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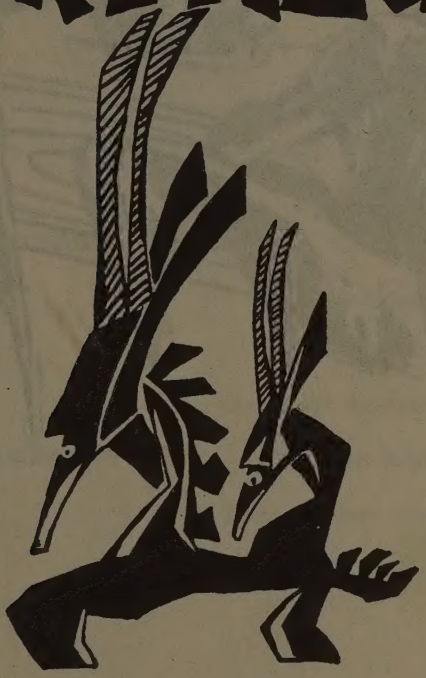

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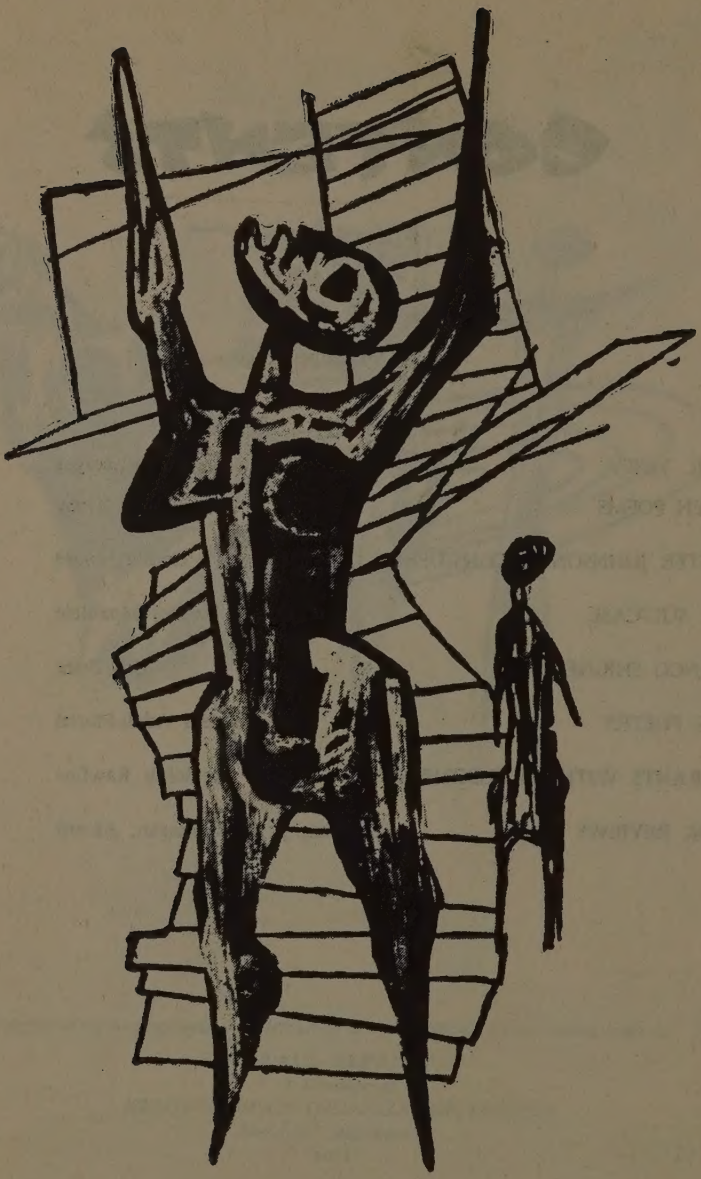


PAUL VESEY

BY GEORG DICKENBERGER

Paul Vesey is an outsider among the Afro-American poets of the United States. He is an outsider, because to him Africa is not merely a romantic background to his metaphors, but a genuine and essential element of his poetic forms and associations.

In analysing Paul Vesey's work, we shall try to discover where America ends and where Africa begins in his poems. Paul Vesey's poems are almost inaccessible at first. Hardly a single image occurs, that he has not examined, destroyed and rebuilt with his highly sensitive visionary power. The interpretation is very difficult for the unprepared reader. One searches in vain for the familiar models, motives, or categories. The African reader may have an advantage, because the poetic method of Vesey is not so foreign to him; he must only try to understand the peculiar situation of the North American negro and to familiarise himself with the subjects and images that are derived from everyday American life or the Biblical similies that are such an essential part of all North American negro poetry: the captivity of Israel in Egypt, Jesus carrying the cross, and so on.

In European and American poetry an image stands for the object it describes. Only in surrealist poetry an image is used to stand for an object normally unrelated. This peculiar feature of surrealism causes the confusion in the mind of the average reader, but it also heightens and intensifies the attraction for the more sensitive reader. In no case, however, does the surrealist poet refer to a definite, defined world that exists behind the temporary world of everyday. The apparently magical aspect arises naturally and logically out-of the arbitrary interchangeability. Occasionally, of course, some strange new relationship or correspondence arises out of this arbitrary interchanging—and a new light may illuminate the subject, a new understanding may be produced. Perhaps this is why sensitive Europeans feel so much attracted by obscure poetry. They always hope that a truth may suddenly be revealed in the incomprehensible.

African poetry has this in common with surrealism, that the image does not merely stand for what it describes. But at the same time it differs from

it, because there is no arbitrary interchanging, the image always symbolises the reality that lies behind the temporary world. Léopold Sédar Senghor has expressed this as follows: "The image is not an equation, but an analogy, a super-real image. An object does not mean what it represents, but what it suggests, or what it creates. Every conception is an image. And the image is not an equation but a symbol, an ideogram."

To Paul Vesey Africa is not "so long, so far away," that there are "not even memories alive." Unlike Langston Hughes (whose "Afro-American Fragment" I have just quoted), Vesey speaks of himself as an "exile" from his "shrouded country". The term "exile" combines a confession and a demand. The "exile" still identifies himself with his country and wants to be reunited with it. Yet this "outsider" Paul Vesey is obliged in many ways to use the images of North America. When he uses this American imagery with an African technique as analogies and symbols, a strange new world is created for the reader, a world that is difficult to interprete and that is close to the realms of magic. The first reaction of the reader maybe confusion. At the same time one becomes immediately aware of Vesey's isolated and highly individual position.

Vesey was born in America, and brought up with American ideas, prejudices and patterns of behaviours. Yet in his poetry he experiences the Africa of his forefathers, and transformed by his poetic vision the idea of Africa becomes as real to him as the everyday "reality" of New York. In Vesey's poetry "Glele" and "umba, ba himba lumba mumba": "the glistening ebony of his great black face" and "the shrine rich in palm oil"; "monkey cock and snake" and the "mess of stars and sand beneath the red sun" mean as much (and perhaps more) than the images he derives from everyday life in New York; the barber in his shop; the underground train, the sky scrapers and all that. Through this fusion of images a new strange world is created that confuses and attracts us. It confuses the African as well as the Westerner, because in Vesey's poetry the two worlds meet — or rather they are being smashed together. Two elements are being fused together under heavy pressure into a new star. Vesey calls this new star: the New Africa.

Many prominent negroes in United States, like Richard Wright, regard Africa like a thing of the past; a past moreover of which one feels ashamed. But for Vesey Africa is something present. It is a living heritage, more than that it is "home". It is true that there remains in Vesey an element of the typical sadness we associate with North American negro poetry and that he has not yet freed himself from the traditional biblical form elements. But these things carry little weight in the face of the new consciousness and the new pride, which are so consistent that they can confront and oppose the spirit of "Americanism" to which nearly all other negro writers have succumbed.

It is a new consciousness that has found expression in Vesey's language. A consciousness whose imagery is both African and occidental but whose mixed heritage confronts us as a unit. For this new world, this third way of life we have so far only the term "négritude", with which the Martiniquese poet

Césaire defined this poetic magic that springs from a defiant consciousness. For Paul Vesey, the mercantile values of American civilization have no more validity. He confronts them with a glowing spirit that addresses itself to the human as such. This new consciousness that creates a new culture out of the clash of two old ones, provides the basis for a new universal poetry that will be equally accessible to both the African and the Western World. In Africa itself and in the Carribbean this phenomenon has already produced a style that has formed a number of authors. In the U.S.A. there appears to be but a single poet who masters the Afro-American culture conflict: Paul Vesey. The phenomenon is basically the same as with Senghor, Césaire and the other poets of the "négritude", but Vesey has a different starting point from these writers: different geographically and therefore culturally.

This has made Vesey's poetry so unyielding, so impenetrable. Sometimes it seems deliberately obscure and enigmatic—as if to keep out unwanted intruders. An example of this deliberate obscurity is the poem "The Death of Uncle Tom" in which the "censor of the unconscious" has turned the white man into a metisse, because in the U.S.A. a negro cannot kill a white man even in a poem. Such transpositions are not mere literary tricks, they enable Vesey to coordinate statement and new consciousness in an almost magical process. They moreover make it possible for him to manifest himself against the oppressing circumstances under which the negro lives in North America. Similar transpositions are made with the figures of Greek mythology. Thus Jason "banned to a foreign shore", resists the "reigning North".

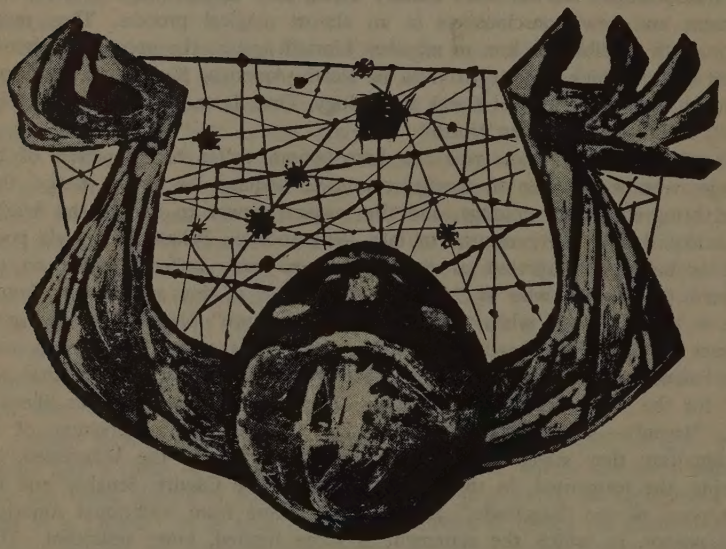
In Greek legend Jason was the hero whom Pelias had deprived of his heritage, who was driven to foreign coasts, to acquire the golden fleece, that would bring its owner courage, and the magical power to rise to the heights of the sky. Jason finally returns to take vengeance on Pelias. In Vesey's poem Jason is being reinterpreted as the black hero who suffers "nailed on the northern cross", but who is "whetting the blade of his approaching hour." Jason is Vesey himself who, "banned to foreign shore" prepares for the great moment is "forging the mail". Just as the fleece gave power to Jason to overcome Pelias, so Vesey forges the mail that will give strength to "him that was rent" for the "approaching hour" of the "huge grey belching". Terms like "I", "he", "Jason" — any personification in fact are not the expression of an individualism; they stand for a group, they stand for all the suppressed, the suffering, the tormented. In this respect Vesey is like Césaire, Senghor and the other poets of the "négritude," and he departs here from traditional American negro poetry, in which the statement is more limited, more restricted. Thus in Langston Hughes' famous poem "Brass spittoon", the spittoon cleaner is touching and moving, but he remains a *single* individual. He may represent a social class, but he does not *speak* for all. His suffering is plaintive but does not rise to the new confidence that Césaire and Vesey have in common.

Vesey has overcome the conflict and the complexes. He becomes firm, almost invulnerable:

Jason stand
Stand — stand Jason!
On the peak of the cross of the reigning north
Jason stands who was rent."

"Who was rent" in other words, he is rent no longer.

What is it then that produces the obscurity of Vesey's verses and makes the understanding so difficult at first? There are a number of poems that express clearly and without compromise the rejection of the West and the inclination towards Africa, but they operate with images, some of which cannot now be interpreted. Neither an African nor a Westerner can sound the full meaning of these images *yet*, because Paul Vesey is the first of a new generation, he is the representative of a culture of the future.



SEVEN POEMS

BY PAUL VESEY

JASON STANDS WHO WAS RENT

The incorrigible tar broke silently across the surf
and there athwart the great oaken beam of the main sail
struck the benevolent mate to port
sweeping him into the depth.
Incorrigible still but strained
he feigned some amusement.
Banned to a foreign shore
he stubbornly rode the waves toward his death
curving a bow, whetting a blade
eyeing the huge grey belching.
But this, through it all, yielded magnificent return,
though fetched far afield for his rallying
laboring, in stall, and faltering
whetting the blade of his approaching hour.
Jason Jason on the mast
Jason — rent, nailed on the northern cross of the rack
struck full the bellows of his pit
forged in mail, O Jason that was rent
that was rent, at the apex of Jason.
Jason stand
stand — stand Jason!
On the peak of the cross of the reigning north
Jason stands who was rent.

EYES WATCH THE STARS

Eyes watch the stars
they are not higher than the year is high.
Casting shadows from midnight
stands a caravan upon the sand.
The waters falter and turn back
cringing from swift terror in the husk.
A blanket will encompass all of them
and a world besides.
I personally look for little from this mess of star and sand
the river dries beneath the red sand.

THERE ARE NO TEARS

See the sky scraper
there before you she stands
gazing calmly down upon your cries for the ancient moorings.
Consider the irrefactible steel
regard the assured hulk
see her feet immovable in the deep earth.
Not her's are the dark incertainties
not her's the lonely cry for the lost old gods
nor the frenetic night of your pursuit of the bright new gods.
She is;
a great gray monolith, stands
massive in repose against the deepening sky
defiant even of the slow mole of time
boring its campaign of attrition.
Tall and cold she stands
a stranger to regret
there are no tears.

THE DEATH OF UNCLE TOM

In the darkness lighted here and eerily there
    among the magnolias
The warning fled through the terrible night
Out of town! Out of town!
Flee! Run! Fly! for your life!
Your life your life your life
Fly fly fly for your life.
On the ancient moss the serpents circled from their mounds
For your life
Fly fly
For your life.
Through the huge heavy leafed bayous
    For your life your life your life
Through the canefield
The crib of his victimization
Through the cottonfield the white bolls bobbing jagged
    under the ribald rising moon
Past the pit, at the edge of town, of his own misapprehension
On, on, greater than the fear
        greater than the pain
        greater than the threat
Mounting to horror and its ineradicable dread,
The obscene whisper warning shout rode through the terrible night.
    I HAVE COME BACK
    I HAVE COME BACK TO THIS DISASTER
    LET MY PRIDE DRINK DEEP IN THE DARK ROARING BLOOD
        OF THAT CASTRATION
    THE FEAR OF THE KNIFE THE DREAD OF THE ROPE
        THE TERROR OF THE HISSING FAGGOT
    DRINK DEEP O DEEP OF THE LOST DRAINED BLOOD OF MY FATHER
        BLED IN THIS DISASTER
Through the night the warning sped
And behind they came
Swift
Sure
Deadly
Through the white fields of cotton
    BACK, SON!
The bolls bobbing thé faces white in pursuit in the night
I saw the sheriff's face high among the trees
    riding the vengeful night.
        GO ON BACK, SON!

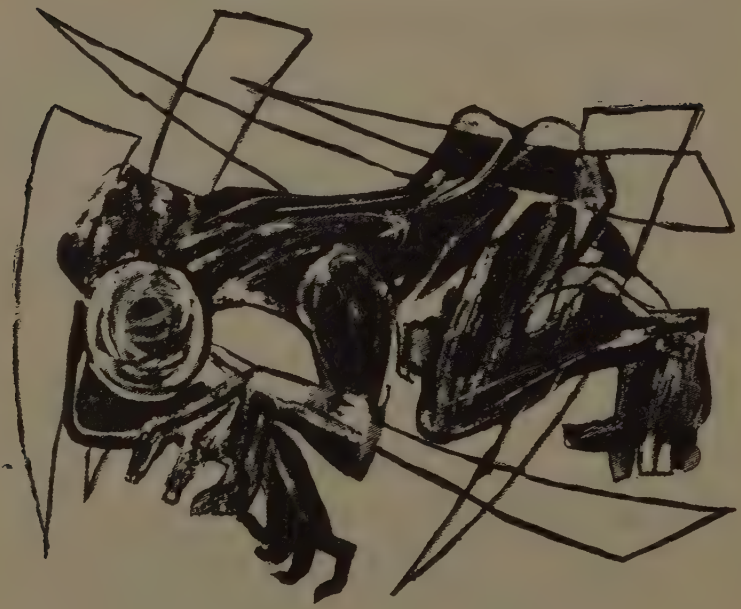
I saw his companion
The big sloping shoulders, the huge pistols, holsters at their belts
Fools! fools! they cried, that he should flee.
They descended for a moment to plan the chase.
They gathered in an opening near a cluster of tall green lichened trees
At once grey haired and faithful Tom sloped forth
    with a prudent black companion
    leashhound of his people.
They circled around above as the white masters talked.
Tom's wallet fell from his pocket
    and dropped with a declaratory clap near the pursuers
Tom zoomed down to retrieve it,
But as he stretched his arm
The voice came hard and commanding,
    Stop, black son of Ham, let me have this wallet
And all the famed ruse and guile of Tom went into play.
The two began a grotesque march around the white men,
    stooping in a row
    bending low
    grinning, and again they go
    around and kettle stiff and slow
    before the masters with a bow
    to scuttle away flapping and batting their wings among the trees.
But then I heard him.
The dollar, Tom cried, it is mine!
Keep back, Tom, the white man called.
The dollar, I say, it is mine, Tom cried, advancing menacingly.
Back, black boy! Back! Are you mad!
The tall muscular black, leashhound of his people stepped between.
I say, master, look, there is no cause for worry
And he flashed a roll of dollar bills.
Tom was on the red coaled grill, speaking with rage and fury,
Accusing, castigating
Never noticing the flame.
Tom's black face dropped great beads of sweat
His short fat fist beat on the grill
His words tumbling out in a ferocity of accusation.
The tall prudent black sat watching by.
The white man rose without a word and left.
Tom followed.
I could see him draw his rifle, aim, fire — once, twice, three, four
    and five times, bucking as the heavy gun recoiled.
The metisse fell, he groaned, he seized his knife,
    with effort slowly rose in pursuit of Tom.
After a moment the two returned in their death agony,
The metisse protesting, why did you do it

I heard about this in the war
But we don't have it up here.
And Tom dying, sobbing,
I put a stop to it
At last I put a stop to it
Now maybe someone will keep it up.
And he came to me and placed his dying head upon my shoulder,
And I cried out, What have you to do with me?
And yet I comforted him,
And with a groan
He gave up the spirit.

(The censor
of the poet's subconscious transforms
the white man into a metisse, —
thus preventing the tabooed
killing of the former).

INCONSOLABLE

Pale and uncertain
ending in death
the ivory tusks they do not want.
The bleached sands sweep my eyelids,
heavy with revolving doors
I turn and turn again
but I am yet not comforted.
I seek the solace of the circling fangs
but I will in no wise be comforted.
I drink huge vats of blood
I devour houses gleaming in the sun
twining green with vine
and I am yet not comforted.
Inconsolable inconsolable inconsolable
all is that matters lost
ice ages of days
and I will not be comforted.



NESSHOUE

This day I acknowledge Nesshoué
    as the goddess of the river
Her shrine shall be rich with palm oil
And her Legba shall I crown with plumes.
She is the handmaiden of Maou
And will intercede for me in the day of evil
She will keep off the evil spirits
And famine shall not come to this land.
In battle shall she lead us, and shall be stronger
    and more cunning than the magic of the enemy,
His warriors shall fall into our hands
And swell the bubbling pots of victory.
These things do I pray in the name of the great Maou
    and his handmaiden Nesshoué,
    who dances by the river.

HIS MAGIC GONE

Agassou, they cried
Has not seen the famine
Does he not know the murder that
    stalks this land
The forest is red in the night
Red with the blood of our priests
Red with the fires of the marauders
And tears stream down
    upon this land.
Maou has frowned, and hides his face
And Lissa, his handmaiden, is silent
She turns from the death that moves into this dominion.
Agassou sees
But snarls in his frustration
His magic gone
His power a tottering throne.

'MISTER JOHNSON' RECONSIDERED

BY GERALD MOORE

Nearly twenty years have passed since Joyce Cary published *Mister Johnson*, the last and finest of his novels of West African life. At that time the number of English readers who had even a passing acquaintance with West Africa was minute; England was not yet 'Africa conscious', and to choose such a setting for a novel was bold and unusual. Since 1945, however, British West Africa has been constantly in the news. The development of air travel has made it possible for thousands of experts, travellers, journalists and politicians to pay at least a short visit to the Coast, whilst a great number and variety of Europeans have been drawn into the many new enterprises springing up there, compared with the handful of officials, missionaries and traders who made up the pre-war white population. As a result of this invasion the market has recently been deluged with African novels'; some of them thinly — disguised travelogues or documentaries; others lurid and melodramatic tales full of juju, erotic dances and scenes of violence; a few earnest but dull. Above this flood of ephemera a novel like *Mister Johnson* shows like a rock and every year seems only to add to its stature. It is the one West African novel we are already tempted to call 'great' (if we exclude *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, which is a visionary epic rather than a novel), just as Cary himself is the one English novelist since Joyce and Lawrence whose major status now seems assured.

All Cary's novels are distinguished by an astonishing power of imaginative projection. He is able to enter imaginatively into situations and characters remote from his own, to depict the world as seen through the transforming eyes of his hero, without surrendering his right as a novelist to show that hero and his world "in the round" and to set them in dynamic contrast with the very different worlds of the other characters. Tragedy in Cary (and his novels are nearly always tragic, despite their brilliant fantasy and humour) arises from the hero's bewilderment at finding that other people do not see the world in his terms, but in some equally arbitrary terms of their own. Collisions between these worlds are not, therefore, incidental, but fundamental and usually destructive.

It is part of the strength of *Mister Johnson* as a book that Cary does not regard his African hero as presenting a radically different problem from the heroes of his other books. There is a discernible kinship between Johnson, the uprooted African clerk, Charley Brown, the young London evacuee of *Charley Is My Darling*, and Gulley Jimson, the outcast painter of *The Horse's Mouth*. Each is distinguished by an extra-ordinary personal force, resilience and energy; each lives entirely according to the law of his own nature unmodified by any understood social code or convention; each dominates those around him by his superior imaginative power but without ever winning any permanent loyalty or understanding from his followers. At this level of creation an African hero does not constitute any "special problem", but this does not mean that Cary subscribes to the sentimental fallacy that Africans are just the same as Europeans "underneath", which they are not. They inhabit the same human scene, however, and consequently their lives are often twisted into similar patterns.

Mister Johnson is, in Cary's own words, "a young clerk who turns his life into a romance, he is a poet who creates for himself a glorious destiny". Though at first lonely and bewildered when uprooted from the South (where he has had a fragmentary Christian education) to a remote pagan community ruled by a reactionary Moslem Emir, he quickly finds means of imposing a temporary domination over the various worlds which impinge on his own. Thus he succeeds in marrying Bamu, the beautiful pagan ferry-girl; he rules Fada township for a while as the all-powerful District Clerk (Mister Rudbeck's frien'); he quickly establishes a strong position in Sargy Gollup's store; and he is the main inspiration behind the completion of Rudbeck's road. But he never comes to understand the terms on which this domination is achieved, and the reverses of fortune always find him surprised and injured. Thus he is unable to grasp that to Bamu and her family he is not a person but a mad foreigner who is tolerated just so long as he appears to be solvent and in a good position with the authorities; he cannot understand why the mysterious official rules which the A.D.O. Rudbeck himself has broken almost with impunity should be invoked to crush him completely; he is astonished when the scheming Waziri, who has toadied to him while he was in a position of power, has him flogged almost to death as soon as he is out of favour. The dynamics of power escape him, for Mister Johnson is so ready to be a friend to all the world and to spend his last shilling in buying it a drink that he never understands how to Fada he is merely a source of diversion and wonder, of lavish parties and mysterious semi-official jobs, but not a person entitled to any friendship or consideration once he ceases to provide these things.

But Johnson's incomprehension is fully matched by the bewilderment of those around him. Bamu's brother Aliu, for example, does not even attempt to understand Fada township and its ways:

> Authority, as he knows it, is always dangerous, selfish, inexplicable. It looks after its own mysterious affairs in a dark privacy. It never explains. Its servants, even the most approachable, like store clerks, resent nothing so much as a request for explanation. Even when they do give it, it is generally false .... But he feels no grievance, because he fully understands

that this is the way things and people are. All things are stubborn and dangerous; all men, except one's own family, find their chief pleasure in tormenting the helpless stranger.

As for Bamu herself, her absolute passivity is the frightening thing about her. She turns to her family for advice because she is accustomed to do so, and whatever their advice may be she will accept it. Thus, if they had told her to stick to Johnson through thick and thin, she would certainly have done so; but when the fugitive Johnson comes to her for help she consults Aliu and is quite happy when he treacherously clubs Johnson from behind while he is eating and hands him over to the police.

Most of the people of Fada, however, have discovered the limits within which they can operate without too much antagonizing the forces that surround their lives. Mister Johnson's fellow Southerners, for instance, the store-clerk Ajali and the postmaster Benjamin, have no moments of glory such as those created by the artist Johnson, but neither are they overwhelmed, as he is, by repeated disasters. Of all the African characters, perhaps only Waziri really understands how everything works in Fada, and nothing would alarm Waziri more than to find himself the object of any special glory or favour.

Rudbeck is really just as bewildered by his situation as anybody else in Fada but his position protects him from the real consequences of his incomprehension and stupidity. Like all officials, his motions are mysterious to others partly because he does not fully understand them himself. His bewilderment finds an outlet in a boyish passion for road building, which he feels to be at least a visible symbol of something achieved in a frustrating, alien land Rudbeck does not fully understand why he wants the road or what its consequences will be, but he is a person given to action rather than speculation. Hence he abandons his station — where the real work of the District needs to be done — for months on end, while he lives the life of a road pioneer far away in the bush. In the circumstances it is hardly surprising that the affairs of the station get out of hand and even the honest Benjamin begins "fiddling" with the Post Office receipts.

Cary's close and intelligent interest in the problems of African government is nicely expressed in the song sung by Rudbeck's finished road:

> "I'm smashing up the old Fada — I shall change everything and everybody in it. I am abolishing the old ways, the old ideas, the old law; I am bringing wealth and opportunity for good as well as vice, new powers to men and therefore new conflicts. I am the revolution. I am giving you plenty of trouble already, you governors, and I am going to give you plenty more. I destroy and I make new. What are you going to do about it? I am your idea. You made me, so I suppose you know".

This song celebrates a problem which has beset colonial administration ever since the idea of 'development' became officially current. Many things were embarked upon as ends in themselves — roads, tin-mines, literacy campaigns, missionising by a hundred conflicting orthodoxies, without any intelligent attempt to foresee what their final social or political effects might be or to make provision for such effects. The proposition was seldom; "We are trying

to produce such and such a social change in this area, therefore let us build a road as a means of assisting it". More often it was simply, as with Rudbeck; "Let's build a road and see what happens".

Among the victims of Rudbeck's road is Johnson, the man who was largely instrumental in getting it finished. It was Johnson who first threw out the idea that it might be possible to link it up with the distant main Kano road; it was Johnson who suggested a way of creating an illicit Road Fund by anticipating next year's vote; and it was Johnson who produced the vital voluntary labour from the pagan villagers to get the road finished before the rains, urging them on with songs full of brilliant fantasy and improvisation:

Bow down old lords of the world,
Put your green heads in the dust.
Salute the roadmen, children of the sky;
Come sun and moon, walk now in the dark wood,
Walk in Rudbeck's road with your long shining feet.

Yet Rudbeck at first snubs the suggestion that the road can be carried so far. He goes off on leave and never thinks of the possible consequences to Johnson when the illicit Road Fund (created on Rudbeck's authority) is discovered by the professional climber Tring, who takes over the District. In the event Johnson is dismissed and spends most of Rudbeck's leave starving and in rags, the wretched road treasurer Audu is flung into prison, whilst Rudbeck, after a few pleasant months in England, returns to receive a mere official reprimand and Tring is actually commended. Rudbeck has no conception how important a figure he is in Johnson's life and he does not feel the real warmth of the boy's devotion. When his wife christens Johnson 'Mister Wog' he does not rebuke her; indeed, he casually adopts the unpleasant, contemptuous nickname himself for domestic use. But he does take Johnson on again, in a semi-official capacity, to assist with the road. When he runs into difficulties with the more remote villagers, who refuse to assist with the clearing of the forest, it is once again Johnson who suggests a way out — free beer will do the trick. Again Rudbeck snubs the idea, but it does not occur to him to wonder why the villagers suddenly begin to come forward in hundreds and enlist the road's cause as their own. When he discovers that Johnson has been levying an illegal tax at the zungo (the travellers' inn at Fada) he does not connect the two events, but acts with a bullish stupidity and impetuosity. He dismisses Johnson with anger and disgrace, refusing even to look at the little sixpenny account book in which Johnson has kept a record of his peculiar transactions. He does not reflect that his own conduct over the Road Fund has set Johnson a poor example of respect for official regulations, nor does he understand that, if Johnson has spent some of this money on himself, his wife and his friends, he has spent far more of it on Rudbeck's road.

By this action Rudbeck smashes the myth which Johnson lives by — "Mr. Rudbeck my frien', he loves me too much". Johnson's life becomes purposeless and he quickly blunders into murder. It is now that Rudbeck vindicates him-

self as a man. Johnson is convicted and sentenced to execution by hanging, but he begs Rudbeck to shoot him with his own hand. Faced with this direct human challenge, Rudbeck steps outside his own world for a moment; he shoots Johnson in the head while he is kneeling in prayer. But this act, which makes Rudbeck a man and re-establishes his human link with Johnson, isolates him as completely as a classical tragic hero. For it is not done, especially in the colonies, to step outside one's world or to ignore the limits of the code one lives by. Consequently the whole station, including his own wife, looks upon Rudbeck as something between a murderer and a traitor:

> He is surprised at himself, but he doesn't feel any violent reaction. He is not overwhelmed with horror. On the contrary, he feels a peculiar relief and escape, like a man who, after a severe bilious attack, has just been sick.
>
> He is mildly surprised to notice the sentry's nervous gesture as he takes the carbine and almost lets it fall; and to hear the sergeant's voice crack as he shouts some incomprehensible order.
>
> The anxious young sergeant has lost his head. Although he has already once turned out the guard, he turns it out again. It is perhaps an instinctive gesture of terror and respect. The men, surprised and alarmed, rush together and present arms. Their movements are ragged but they stand at the present with backs so hollow that they seem to be dislocated. You can see right down their hairless nostrils; but their eyes are not looking to their front; they are all fixed on Rudbeck. His teeth are bared, his eyes are like bull's eyes with a ring of white all round. Beyond the sergeant the whole population of the barracks and station, the constables, the barrack women, the little market women, are standing in a crowd, pressed together like one animal, and quite still. Not a rag moves. But all their eyes are fixed on Rudbeck with the same expression of greedy interest.

Joyce Cary's agile sympathy enables him to write at once subjectively and objectively. What other word than 'subjective' can we use for the extra-ordinary feeling and insight with which Johnson is created *from inside*? It is here that I must disagree with Dr. Davidson Nicol, who has said in his lecture *On Not Being a West African* (Ibadan University Press, 1955):

> Johnson is an improbable figure caught in circumstances in which anyone could have escaped. Cary, in trying to project himself into his chief character, has not entirely succeeded because he does not know enough of the world of clerks to know what Johnson should do next off-duty. In Johnson's relationship with Rudbeck, the D.O., Cary is on safe ground because he has doubtless come across many such clerks himself; but when Johnson leaves the European presence, authenticity vaporizes and he becomes conjectural. In Cary's defence, we may ask ourselves how many of us know what our junior clerks, laboratory assistants and office messengers do between two in the afternoon and eight in the morning.

The last sentence is something of a give-away, for we may go on to wonder whether a highly-sophisticated modern African like Dr. Nicol is really in a

better position than Cary to know how Johnson would have spent his time in a Borgu township forty years ago. As a European, I feel some deference about disagreeing with Dr. Nicol on this issue, but I must record that in my opinion Johnson is a far from improbable figure (allowing for the legitimate use of creative fantasy in building a fictional hero — Gulley Jimpson no less than Johnson). Also it is quite irrelevant to say that his are circumstances which "anyone could have escaped". One does not write tragic novels about people who escape moral dilemmas, but about people who are involved in them. In short, I believe Dr. Nicol has fallen into the same trap which awaits many European readers of the book; he believes the satire to be largely at Johnson's expense, that we are being invited to laugh at this figure of exaggerated fun. Such a judgement entirely misses the real quality of the novel, for in fact Johnson, despite his weakness, is far and away the dominating figure in it. His imagination is creative and often beautiful — witness his songs for the roadmen — and he is the only character whom Cary may be said to love. Rudbeck's moment of glory comes when he recognises Johnson as a unique human being and no longer simply as a clerk.

But we are not shown only Johnson's world, we are also shown the world of Rudbeck, of Waziri, even of Bamu, and Cary's satire plays around them all. The objective Cary is shown splendidly in the handling of Rudbeck's wife Celia, whose picture-postcard idea of Africa causes her to be first over-stimulated, and then rapidly bored, by the reality:

> Fada is the ordinary native town of the Western Sudan. It has no beauty, convenience or health ... It is a pioneer settlement five or six hundred years old, built on its own rubbish heaps, without the charm even of antiquity. Its squalor and its stinks are all new ... Fada has not been able to achieve its own native arts or the characteristic beauty of its country. There are no flowering trees or irrigated gardens; no painted or moulded courtyard walls ... The young boys, full of curiosity and enterprise, grow quickly into old, anxious men, content with mere existence ... An English child in Fada with eyes that still see what is in front of them, would be terrified by the dirts, the stinks, the great sores on naked bodies, the twisted limbs, the babies with their enormous swollen stomachs and their hernias; the whole place, flattened upon the earth like the scab of a wound, would strike it as something between a prison and a hospital. But to Celia it is simply a native town. It has been labelled for her, in a dozen magazines and snap-shots, long before she comes to it. Therefore she does not see it at all. She does not see the truth of its real being, but the romance of her ideas, and it seems to her like the house of the unspoilt primitive, the simple dwelling-place of unsophisticated virtue.

Against the irony and realism of this may be set a passage in which Cary conveys something of the strange excitement instilled by the human geography of Africa:

> One day a party of hoemen are working about ten o'clock near their own village. They have fifty yards of ditch to finish and they work like fury. Every now and then one of them, straightening his back for a moment, and flicking the sweat from his neck, looks up and down and repeats the formula, 'Allah, what a road'. Then all stand and answer with some current phrase, 'It is a road', or, 'A road, friends, yes, a road', in a high-pitched tone of wonder.
>
> The road, at this place, is merely a long narrow strip of hard mud, littered with half-burnt chips, which passes out of sight in both directions into the high, primeval bush, familiar to them all.....
>
> The little group of hoemen, their bodies glistening with sweat, who stand under these enormous vaults in the hot gloom, are at home. They smile at the road, because they have made it and sung of it, but they have no idea of its beginning or end. They are still like men brought up on a forgotten island far from ship routes, to whom the rest of the world is as much a mystery, a blank inhabited by monsters, as to their ancestors of the Stone Age..... Suddenly, in the immense silence of the morning, familiar as the forest twilight, which seems like the very substance of it, they hear a strange noise, between drumming and gunfire. It increases quickly. Two of the pagans dart among the trees and disappear into the silence. The rest stiffen. They do not seem to move, but each muscle is tense; their eyes open widely and stare with fixed and blank apprehension.
>
> A lorry comes pounding out of the shadows, and at once they know what it must be. Two or three voices together cry, 'Motor!'
>
> All grin with astonishment and delight. They lift their hoes and rush forward shouting greetings. The lorry driver, a tall Yoruba in blue dungarees, with a stub of cigarette stuck to his lips, pays no attention to them. He clanks and rattles past and disappears from sight. He doesn't even know he is the first man to drive over the Fada road.....

This is the world, complex rather than primitive, in which Joyce Cary sets his novel; a world where pagan democrats are ruled over jointly by Moslem autocrats and English bureaucrats; a world where cultural disruption and decay move hand in hand with new wealth, new opportunities. It is a world where uprooted individuals struggle to find their moral bearings in strange surroundings; a world swept over by successive waves of change — half plotted, half accidental — whose full consequences no-one has foreseen. And here a word of warning is necessary. Joyce Cary writes of the Africa he knew forty years ago. African readers should not, unless they are old men, judge the fidelity of his description by their own knowledge of modern Nigeria. Unimaginable changes have passed over the land since Cary rode and trekked through the then remote provinces of Borgu, the Middle Niger and the Cameroons. But the human situation has not changed. Africa still has its tragedies of misunderstanding, its overlapping circles of resentment and irritation, cut through occasionally by flashes of sympathy or acts of human generosity. It is still a land where the individual is stranded in a new situation which tests him morally and emotionally without mercy.

The time has come when Africans will probably wish to face and study their own past, distracted neither by shame nor by a wish to gloss it over

with a varnish of sentiment. In that judgement the African novels of Joyce Cary will be vital documents, for the Nigeria of those days has no other chronicler who writes with comparable understanding and compassion, with keen critical intelligence yet with love. Few writers at any time have so combined a serious interest in the problems of government with a huge delight in the variety and energy of human nature. It is the perfect combination for the subject (though it must have made him a very unusual Political Officer) No-one else evokes so well the queer excitement which hangs over that great land in its most baffling or exasperating moments.

* Joyce Cary's African novels are as follows: *Aissa Saved* (1932), *An American Visitor* (1933), *The African Witch* (1936). *Mister Johnson* (1939). All are published by Michael Joseph, London.

THE SUITCASE

A SHORT STORY BY EZEKIEL MPAHLELE

One of these days he was going to take a desperate chance, Timi thought. He would not miss it if it presented itself. Many men had got rich by sheer naked chance. Couldn't it just be that he was destined to meet such a chance?

He sat on a pavement on a hot afternoon. It was New Year's Eve. And in such oppressive heat Timi had been sitting for over an hour. An insect got into his nostril and made him sneeze several times. Through the tears that filled his eyes the traffic seemed to dance about before him.

The grim reality of his situation returned to him with all its cold and aching pain after the short interlude with the insect. Today he had been led on something like a goose chase. He had been to three places where chances of getting work were promising. He had failed. At one firm he had been told, "We've already got a boy, Jim." At the second firm a tiny typist told him. "You're too big, John. The boss wants a small boy — about eighteen you know." Then she had gone on with her typing, clouding her white face with cigarette smoke. At the third place of call a short pudgy white man put down his price in a squeaking voice: "Two pounds ten a week." Three pounds ten a week, Timi had said. "Take it or leave it, my boy," the proprietor had said as his final word, and snorted to close the matter. Timi chuckled softly to himself at the thought of the pudgy man with fat white cheeks and small blinking eyes.

He was watching the movements of a wasp tormenting a worm. The wasp circled over the worm and then came down on the clumsy and apparently defenceless worm. It seemed to stand on its head as it stung the worm. The worm wriggled violently, seeming to want to fly away from the earth. Then suddenly the worm stretched out, as though paralysed. The winged insect had got its prey. Timi felt pity for the poor worm. An unequal fight, an unfair fight, he thought. Must it always be thus, he asked — the well armed and agile creature sting the defenceless to death? The wasp was now dragging the worm to its home, evidently.

He remembered he had nothing to take home. But the thought comforted him that his wife was so understanding. A patient and understanding wife. Yes,

she would say, as she had often said, "Tomorrow's sun must rise, Timi. It rises for everyone. It may have its fortunes;" or "I will make a little fire, Timi. Our sages say even where there is no pot to boil there should be fire."

Now she was ill. She was about to have a baby; a third baby. And with nothing to take home for the last two months, his savings running out, he felt something must be done. Not anything that would get him into jail. No, not that. It wouldn't do for him to go to jail with his wife and children almost starving like that. No, he told himself emphatically.

A white man staggered past him, evidently drunk. He stopped a short way past Timi and turned to look at him. He walked back to Timi and held out a bottle of brandy before him, scarcely keeping firm on his legs.

"Here, John, drink this stuff. Happy New Year!" Timi shook his head.

"C'mon, be — be a s-sport, hic! No p-police to catch you, s-s-see?"

Timi shook his head again and waved him away.

"Huh, here's a bugger don't want to have a happy New Year, eh. Go t-to hell then."

The white man swung round, brandishing his bottle as he tripped away.

If only that were money, Timi thought bitterly.

He remembered it was time he went home, and boarded a bus to Sophiatown. In the bus he found an atmosphere of revelry. The New Year spirit, he thought; an air of reckless abandon. Happy New Year! one shouted at intervals.

Timi was looking at a man playing a guitar just opposite him across the aisle. Here a girl was dancing to the rhythm of the music. The guitarist strummed away, clearly carried away in the flight of his own music. He coaxed, caressed and stroked his instrument. His long fingers played effortlessly on the strings. He glowered at the girl in front of him with hanging lower lip as she twisted her body seductively this way and that, like a young supple plant that the wind plays about with. Her breasts pushed out under a light sleeveless blouse. At the same time the guitarist bent his ear to the instrument as if to hear better its magic notes, or to whisper to it the secret of his joy.

Two young women came to sit next to Timi. One of them was pale, and seemed sick. The other deposited a suitcase in front between her leg and Timi's. His attention was taken from the music by the presence of these two women. They seemed to have much unspoken between them.

At the next stop they rose to alight. Timi's one eye was fixed on the suitcase as he watched them go towards the door. When the bus moved a man who was sitting behind Timi exclaimed. "Those young women have left their case."

"No, it is mine," said Timi hastily.

"No. I saw them come in with it."

This is a chance .....

"I tell you it's mine."

"You can't tell me that."

Now there mustn't be any argument, or else .....

"Did you not see me come in with a case?"

I mustn't lose my temper, or else .....

"Tell the truth, my man, it bites no one."

"What more do you want me to say now?"

The people are looking at me now. By the gods, what can I do?

"It is his lucky day," shouted someone from the back, "let him be!"

"And if it is not his, how is this a lucky day?" asked someone else.

"Ha, ha, ha!" A woman laughed. "You take my thing, I take yours, he takes somebody else's. So we all have a lucky day, eh? Ha, ha, ha." She rocked with voluble laughter, seeming to surrender herself to it.

"Oh, leave him alone," an old voice came from another quarter, "only one man saw the girls come in with a suitcase, and only one man says it is his. One against one. Let him keep what he has, the case. Let the other man keep what he has, the belief that it belongs to the girls." There was a roar of laughter. The argument melted in the air of a happy New Year, of revelry and song.

Timi felt a great relief. He had won.

The bus came to a stop and he alighted. He did not even hear someone behind him in the bus cry, "That suitcase will yet tell whom it belongs to, God is my witness!" Why can't people mind their own affairs? He thought of all those people looking at him.

Once out of the bus he was seized by a fit of curiosity, anxiousness and expectancy. He must get home quickly and see what is in the case.

It was a chance, a desperate chance, and he had taken it. That mattered to him most as he paced up the street.

Timi did not see he was about to walk into a crowd of people. They were being searched by the police, two white constables. He was jolted into attention by the shining of a badge. Quickly he slipped into an open back-yard belonging to a Chinaman. Providence was with him, he thought, as he ran to stand behind the great iron door, his heart almost choking him.

He must have waited there for fifteen minutes, during which he could see all that was happening out there in the street. The hum and buzz so common to Good Street rose to a crescendo; so savage, so cold-blooded, so menacing. Suddenly he got a strange and frightening feeling that he had excited all this noise, that he was the centre around which these angry noises whirled and circled, that he had raised a hue and cry.

For one desperate second he felt tempted to leave the case where he squatted. It would be so simple for him, he thought. Yes, just leave the case there and have his hands, no, more than that, his soul, freed of the burden. After all, it was not his.

Not his. This thought reminded him that he had done all this because it

was not his. The incident in the bus was occasioned by the stark naked fact that the case was not his. He felt he must get home soon because it was not his. He was squatting here like an outlaw, because the case was not his. Why not leave it here then, after all these efforts to possess it and keep it? There must surely be valuable articles in it. Timi mused. It was so heavy. There must be. It couldn't be otherwise. Else why had Providence been so kind to him so far? Surely the spirits of his ancestors had pity on him; with a sick wife and hungry children. Then the wild, primitive determination rose in him; the blind determination to go through with a task once begun, whether a disaster can be avoided in time or not, whether it is to preserve worthless or valuable articles. No, he was not going to part with the case.

The pick-up van came and collected the detained men and women. The police car started up the street. Timi came out and walked on the pavement, not daring to look behind, lest he lose his nerve and blunder. He knew he was not made for all this sort of thing. Pitso was coming up the pavement in the opposite direction. Lord, why should it be Pitso just at this time? Pitso, the gasbag, the notorious talker whose appearance always broke up a party. They met.

"Greetings! You seem to be in a hurry, Timi?" Pitso called out in his usual noisy and jovial fashion. "Are you arriving or going?"

"Arriving." Timi did not want to encourage him.

"Ha, since when have you been calling yourself A.J.B.?"

"Who says I'm A.J.B.?"

"There my friend." Pitso pointed at the large initials on the case, and looked at his friend with laughing eyes.

"Oh, it's my cousin's." Timi wished he could wipe a broad stupid grin off the large mouth of this nonentity. He remembered later how impotent and helpless he felt now. For Pitso and his grin were inseparables, like Pitso and his mouth. Just now he wished he wouldn't look so uneasy. "I'm sorry, Pitso, my wife isn t well, and I must hurry." He passed on. Pitso looked at his friend, his broad mouth still smiling blankly.

The Chevrolet came to stop just alongside the pavement. Then it moved on, coasting idly and carelessly.

"Hey!" Timi looked to his left. Something seemed to snap inside him and release a lump shooting up to his throat. "Stop, jong!" The driver waved to him.

There they were, two white constables and an African in plain clothes in the back seat. Immediately he realized it would be foolish to run. Besides, the case should be his. He stopped. The driver went up to him and wrenched the suitcase from Timi's hand. At the same time he caught him by the shoulder and led him to the car, opening the back door for Timi. The car shot away to the police station.

His knees felt weak when he recognized the black man next to him. It

was the same man who was the first to argue that the case was not Timi's in the bus. By the spirits, did the man have such a strong sense of justice as to call God to be witness? Even on New Year's Eve? Or was he a detective? No, he could have arrested him on the bus. The man hardly looked at Timi. He just looked in front of him in a self-righteous posture, as it struck Timi.

Timi got annoyed; frantically annoyed. It was a challenge. He would face it. Things might turn round somewhere. He felt he needed all the luck fate could afford to give him.

At the police station the two constables took the case into a small room. After a few minutes they came out, with what Timi thought was a strange communication of feelings between them as they looked at each other.

"Kom, kom, jong!" One of them said, although quite gently. They put the case in front of him.

"Whose case is this?"

"Mine."

"Do you have your things in here?"

"My wife's things."

"What are they?"

"I think she has some of her dresses in it."

"Why do you say you *think*?"

"Well, you see, she just packed them up in a hurry, and asked me to take them to her aunt; but I didn't see her pack them."

"Hm. You can recognize your life's clothing?"

"Some of it." Why make it so easy for him? And why was there such cold amusement in the white man's eyes?

The constable opened the suitcase, and started to unpack the articles singly.

"Is this your wife's?" It was a torn garment

"Yes."

"And this? And this?" Timi answered yes to both. Why did they pack such torn clothing? The constable lifted each one up before Timi. Timi's thoughts were racing and milling round in his head. What trick was fate about to play him? He sensed there was something wrong. Had he been a dupe?

The constable, after taking all the rags out, pointed to an object inside. "*And is this also your wife's?*" glaring at Timi with aggressive eyes.

Timi stretched his neck to see.

It was a ghastly sight. A dead baby that could not have been born more than twelve hours before. A naked, white, curly haired image of death. Timi gasped and felt sick and faint. They had to support him to the counter to make a statement. He told the truth. He knew he had gambled with chance; the chance that was to cost him eighteen months' hard labour.

ṢANGO SHRINE

OF THE TIMI OF EDE

BY ULLI BEIER

The European art critic and art lover often seems to think that individualism in art is a European invention. "Primitive" art is said to be completely conventionalized. The carver is said to express a common accepted concept of his subject and not his own personal one. We tend to forget that European artists too worked within certain set conventions, except perhaps during the last half century. To an African observer Michaelangelo, Raffael and Leonardo all look very much alike, because he will at first only notice the things they have in common, such as proportions, anatomy or perspective which are all strikingly different from their own art. In the same way the European looking at African art sees first of all only that all figure carvings seem to have very large heads, that all human forms are stylized and partially abstracted, that there is a certain limitation of movement and gesture and so on. But the trained observer finds no difficulty in distinguishing the hand of different carvers, and where sufficient specimens from one artist have survived it is even possible to trace the carver's development and the different 'periods' in his creative life. In this number of "Black Orpheus" we publish photographs of carvings that are all in a single shrine in the Yoruba town of Ede. There are twenty four figures in this shrine, and although nobody now remembers who carved them and how old they are it is easy to see that they come from four different workshops.

The Yoruba are a tribe of prolific woodcarvers, who live in Western Nigeria. Traditional woodcarving has very nearly died out, but thousands of carvings can still be found in the shrines of the traditional gods, who are still being worshipped. Among these gods "SHANGO" the thunder god is perhaps the most colourful of all. His power and force are symbolized by thunder and lightening which are said to be expressions of his wrath. He is also identified with one of the founders of the Yoruba nation: Alafin Shango, one of the early kings of the mighty town of Oyo. A vast body of mythology is woven around this deified king who is said to have been a splendid but tyrannical

THE SHANGO SHRINE OF THE TIMI OF EDE

PLATE 1.

P.
II.

ruler. He was a magician of great power, but accidentally destroyed his palace by thunder, killing most of his wives and children. Then he hanged himself in great despair [2]. But a few of his friends remained faithful to him even after his tragic death. They began to worship him. Significantly the Yoruba expression for worship is "to make a god", which means roughly to build up his power. A Yoruba "orisha" [3] or deity cannot exist independently of men. It is the intensity of worship that makes him a great god. From the songs and prayers and praise names of the worshippers, Shango emerges as a tremendous personality. He is wild and always eager to fight ("he kills the sheep and washes in its blood") and in his moments of sudden unpredictable anger he is feared by worshippers and non worshippers alike. Though he is quick-tempered he is also very generous ("he lends money and forgets to ask for its return") and he freely gives children, wealth and power to the worshippers. Although he dislikes and punishes liars and thieves ("he wrinkles his nose and the liar runs away") he is not a moral god. The Yoruba conceive their gods not as moral or perfect beings, but as sources of power. The purpose of worshipping Shango is not to become a perfect human being but to live a fuller, intensified life. It is interesting to note that this enhancement of life actually takes place. Today where there are many Yoruba who are Moslem or Christian the "orisha" worshippers stand out as powerful and highly sensitive personalities. They live at different levels of consciousness at the same time. Telepathetic communication, a rare occurence in Europe, is common among them. They can induce trance states at will and thus open up to themselves realms of human experience that are closed to most other men. These trance states, in which the worshipper is "possessed" by Shango, or whoever happens to be his 'orisha', are meant to change the personality of the worshipper. They gradually turn him into a person of the "Shango type." Extrovert, bold, unpredictable, generous, imaginative, colourful: those are the characteristics that spring to mind, when one thinks of a Shango worshipper. But the trance states have the added purpose of extending the worshippers psychic experience and of opening up realms of "knowledge" to him that are closed to him in a state of normal consciousness. At times the so-called "prophecies" of the possessed may be nothing but vague and general pronounciations about the future of the town and the community. But very often they are detailed analyses of personal relationships. Tensions that exist in the town, between different factions or between important people are suddenly seen and explained in their true significance and remedies are suggested. I have even known people in trance warn others of their own secret intentions. In the state of trance, furthermore, the worshipper experiences states of exultation that no person living exclusively at the national level could take part in. Thus the heightened existence becomes indeed a reality to the worshipper.

It was necessary to deviate into these religious questions in order to explain the function of the carver in Yoruba society. From the foregoing it is already clear that the worship of Shango is a highly complex spiritual process that has nothing to do with "fetishism" or "idol worship". These are meaningless derogative terms invented by ignorant and unsympathetic European observers. A carving in a Shango shrine is not worshipped. Shango himself is practically never represented. The carvings are mostly identified as the gods' wives, priests, followers and initiates. In the case of the Ede shrine the original identity of the twenty-four figures has been lost and they are now vaguely described by the aged priestess as people killed by lightening. This may have applied to some of the figures, but others were definitely identified as priests by the carver. (The figures on Plate II top right are wearing the hairstyle of Shango priests and one is holding a Shango priest's staff, in the shape of a double axe.) The figures have no direct function in the worship. There are Shango shrines without such carvings and the weekly and annual ceremonies go on just the same. The more sacred symbols of Shango are in fact flint stones and celts who symbolise his thunderbolts, and similar objects. The purpose of the carvings is difficult to define. They are more than mere decoration. They are intended to create an atmosphere, a feeling of heightened reality which is conducive to worship. One or two carvings are functional in the sense that they are used to support the calabash in which the sacred thunderbolts are kept. But the majority act through their mere presence. They help the worshipper to achieve the calm state of concentration, and the condition of receptiveness that is necessary if the god is to manifest himself during the ceremonies [4]. Let us examine now with what stylistic means this end is achieved.

An examination of the photographs will show that all the carvings adhere to a set of conventions: the figures are static and do not depict any movement. They stand solidly on both feet, with the weight evenly distributed. No turning or twisting of the body is attempted, that would cause a shifting of the vertical axis. The head is proportionately large, the eyes are bulging and the head is carved with greater care and detail than the body. The legs are short and the carving of the feet is comparatively rough. The basic forms are organic. Anatomical features are clearly recognizable: cheekbones, eyelids, lips are often delicately carved. But the basic forms have been stylized to a high degree, sometimes approaching abstraction. (The eyes on Plate V for example have been dissolved into a series of triangles.) The features of the carvings indicate types rather than portraits. The figures from one carver usually show a very strong family likeness. It has been said by an authority on Yoruba art that Yoruba carvings have "no expression". This is true in the very limited sense of the word, that they are not shown laughing or weeping, or being angry, or smiling. But there *is* an expression, in fact a very powerful one. It has been said that they reflect "dignified repose", but this is rather an understatement. I would rather call it "powerful concentration". The Yoruba carver represents his figures perfectly static and completely vertical and without conflicting

PLATE III.

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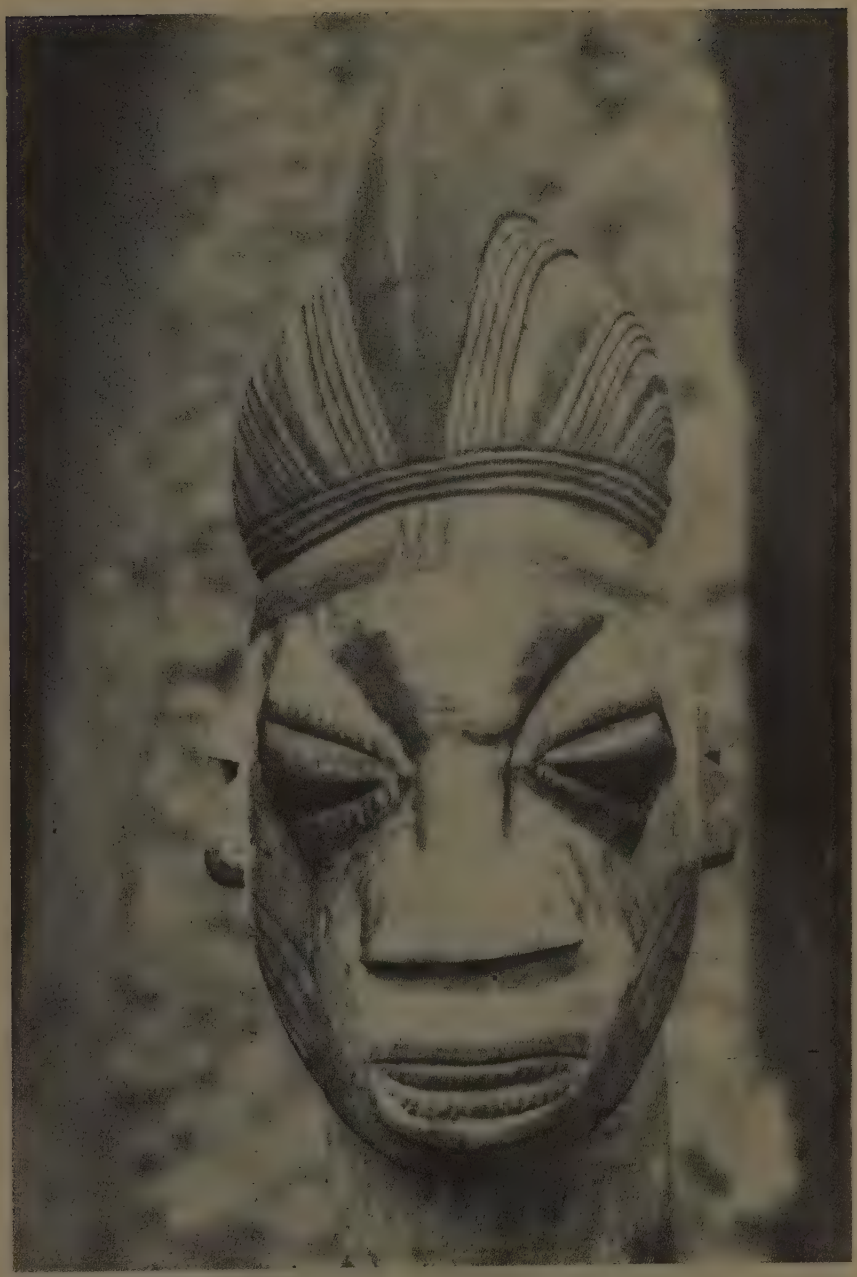


P.
V

P.
VI.

diagonals. But the calm harmony which is achieved in this way in not the serene detached harmony of, say, ancient Greek sculpture. The bulging forms of Yoruba art seem to suggest a forceful pressure from within pushing to the outside. It is as if an extremely powerful emotion was deliberately controlled. It is an expression which is familiar to all who have witnessed orisha worshippers during ceremonies. There is a popular belief that "pagans" let themselves go and become frantic during their worship. This is completely untrue. The mounting emotional tension is completely controlled and there is a tremendous feeling of concentration. Even the "possessions" do not take place at random, but they occur at precisely fixed moments during the ritual and mostly to specially chosen people. The Yoruba carver represents this heightened state, this intensified experience which is the purpose of "orisha" worship. The final impression of harmony which the carver achieves is the result of controlled tension, of rigid form imposed on the pressure that seems to come from inside the carving.

It is possible to generalise to this extent about the carvings in the Ede shrine and in fact these remarks would apply to most Yoruba woodcarving.

But within the limits set by this convention, there is still a great deal of room left for individual interpretations and highly personal styles. In the Shango shrine in Ede four carvers were obviously at work. The first artist produced two carvings of kneeling women, each holding a flat round disc on her head. (Plate II top left. Also detail on Plate III). Both of these carvings are used in the shrine to support the calabash holding the "thunderbolts". Their style can easily be differentiated from the rest. The head is even larger in proportion to the body and the eyes are even bigger. The head and body are bulky, the breasts very long, pendulous and tight. By contrast the limbs are small, thin, and angular. This contrast between the large, soft, round bodies and the undersized, almost crippled limbs gives the figures an appearance of tenderness and gentleness, almost helplessness. This is the gentlest of the four artists. His gentleness is also expressed in the soft, bulging form, the mild curves of the face. Notice the broad and high forehead bending smoothly. The protruding, ball like eyes, that do not focus on anything but seem to be turned inward. The soft ,broad nostrils, the wide sensitive mouth. Deep incisions giving hard shadows are carefully avoided and the surface of the figure is treated with much delicacy. The forms, particularly the faces are slightly more naturalistic and less geometrical than in the other carvings. They are warm, fullblooded, motherly figures.

Almost in complete contrast is the work of the second carver, who is represented by four figures in the Ede shrine. (See Plate II top right and Plate VII right. Detail of a head on Plate V. The four figures can easily be picked out on Plate I.) If the first artist expressed the humanity of the orisha, this one expresses his power. The four figures have massive, solid bodies, and stand heavily on short, thick legs. They have square shoulders like a fighter. They

all wear the traditional headdress of Shango priests. The faces express extreme concentration, energy and power, reminiscent of a priest possessed by Shango. The figures are boldly carved, conceived in large geometric shapes. Very deep incisions are made that create deep black shadows. The eyes are popping out of the head like those of a man in trance. The mouth expresses tension—the lips bare the teeth. Although the figures are as vertical and static as any as the others, they are so laden with energy that they seem ready to break out into a wild dance.

The third carver is represented by ten carvings in the Ede shrine. These include a horseman and the dog of Shango. (See Plate II bottom right, and Plate VII left. Details of head Plate IV. Detail of horse Plate VIII top left; dog Plate VIII top right, child Plate VIII bottom right).

This carver has the most spiritual conception of Shango. The figures are extremely tall and slender and for a Yoruba carving the head is relatively small. The figure seems to rise elegantly from its base. More than the other artists this one has dispensed with the basic anatomy of the human figure. Note the long, steep, sloping shoulders, from which the arms grow without a joint. Compare the delicate slender neck with the massive necks of the second carver. The body of the carving on Plate VII seems to disintegrate under the delicately slender form imposed by the artist. There is an almost Gothic feeling of transcendentalism. The eyes of the carving are half closed by Yoruba standards, the face is ecstatic, though calm. The face of the horseman (Plate IV) looks remarkably introvert, if compared with the head on Plate V by the second carver. It is interesting to note, that not all the ten carvings express this same concept. On Plate I one can see three carvings side by side at half-back view standing in the foreground, right. Of these only the central figure, with a child on her back, has the same proportions as the horseman and the figure on Plate VII (left). The others are shorter, plumper, heavier. Yet they all come undoubtedly from the same workshop. Note such details as the way in which the line from the chin is carried round behind the neck; the stylization of the ear; the sloping shoulder. It is possible that these carvings represent two phases in the same artists work. But it may also be, that they are carvings by different artists working in the same workshop. Woodcarving was a family tradition in Yorubaland, and usually a father would train one or two of his sons. Unfortunately nothing is known about the artist. Nor have I seen carvings by any of the three artists discussed so far in any shrine except the one in Ede.

The work of the fourth carver on the other hand can be found in various places in Ede, and specimens of his smaller carvings (Ibeji twin figures and Shango priests staffs have been seen up to sixty miles away from Ede.) There are eight of his gnome like figures in this shrine. (See Plate II bottom left: detail of head Plate VI; detail of child Plate VIII bottom left.)

In some respects these figures are the most stylized of all. The face on Plate VI bears less resemblance to a human face than any of the others. The head is conceived as a perfectly smooth eggshape into which the features have

PLATE VII.

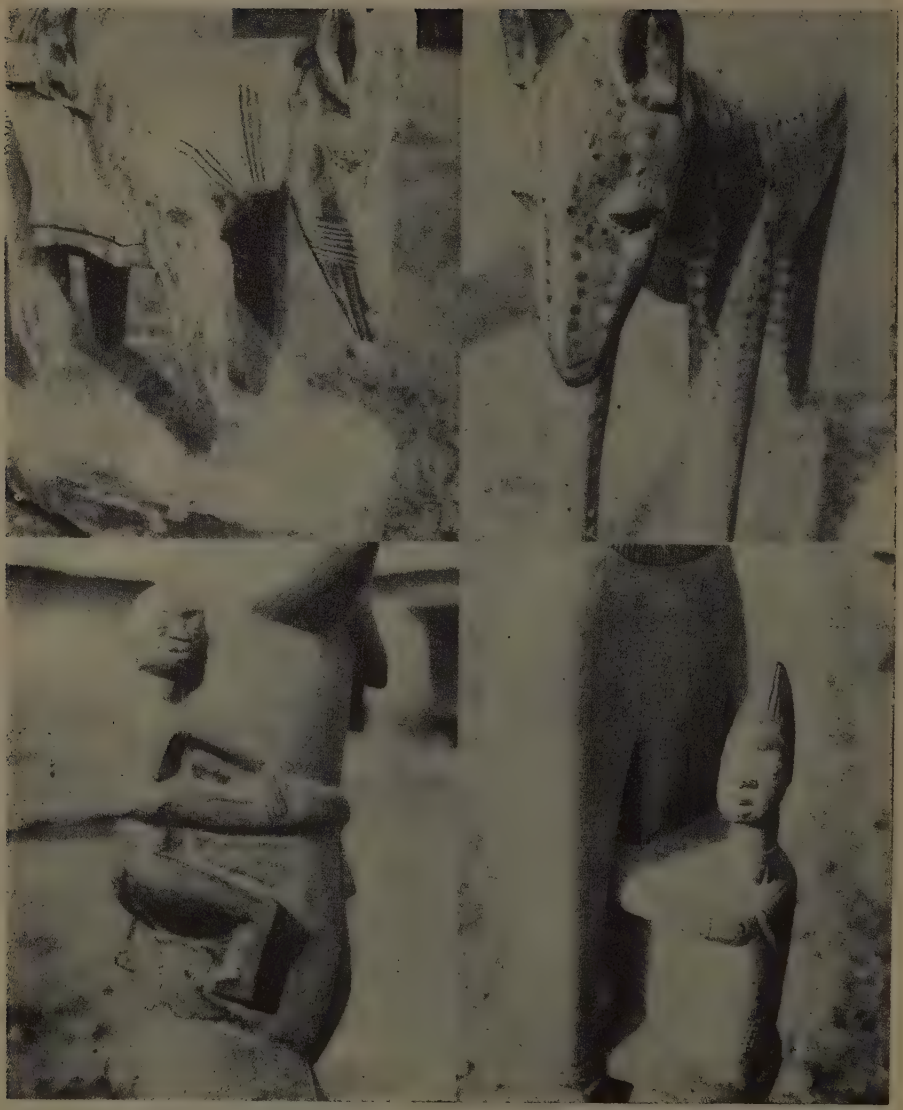


PLATE VIII.

been cut. The features are completely geometrical. The eyes are diamonds, the nose is a triangle, the lips two heavy parallel lines. There are no anatomical features in the face. Cheekbones and forehead have become quite unrecognizable. The only naturalistic features are perhaps the tribal marks and the eyelashes, but these have been retained clearly for their decorative value. The strange shape on top of the head does not represent a cap, but the double axe of Shango. The double axe is a stylization of ram's horns. The ram is Shango's sacred animal, because of the quick "lightening" movements of its head. This double axe usually decorates the staff of a Shango priest. It is unusual to find it on a large figure like this. The total effect of this carving is unreal, spirit-like. This artist dose not express the humanity, the power, or the trance but the magical aspect of the worship. Shango worshippers are great magicians. Not only are they said to be able to control lightening, but on the great annual festival they perform breathtaking feats, driving nails through their tongues and knives into their flesh. The Shango priest is able to perform such feats, because he is living in such close contact with the spirit world.

In this way the four carvers, while moving within the traditions and accepted conventions of Yoruba art express their own personal concept of "orisha" worship. Although none of these carvings represents an "orisha" himself, yet they reflect the artist's attitude to the god and his interpretation of his worship.

NOTES:

1) TIMI is the title of the king of the town of Ede. According to tradition he was a general of Alafin Shango, who later became an independant chief. There are many shrines of Shango in Ede, the figures discussed here being from the King's own shrine. Although the present holder of the title is a Christian he must perpetuate the worship of Shango in the interest of his subjects.

2) The myths relating to Shango's death have been written down so many times that I have refrained from repeating them here. Readers could consult: Frobenius: "The Voice of Africa", Verger: "Les Dieux d'Afrique" or Beier: "The Story of Sacred Wood Carvings from one small Yoruba Town".

3) The Yoruba believe in a supreme God Olorun, who is however not worshipped directly. An "orisha" is usually an ancestor who achieved supernatural status even during his life. An "orisha" is not the equivalent of God, but he personifies certain aspects of the divine being. For a fuller definition of the "orisha" and their relationship to the supreme God see: "The Story of Sacred Wood Carvings from One Small Yoruba Town": A Nigeria Magazine Production, Lagos 1957.

4) In some shrines the figures are symbolically "fed" during a sacrifice. After the "orisha" has received his share, each carving has a little blood smeared on the mouth and little bits of meat and yam placed in front of it. This is a way of indicating that the spirits of the deceased priests are asked to participate in the ceremony. It is perhaps this practice which has given rise to the myth of "fetishism".

EWE POETRY

BY GEORMBEEYI ADALI-MORTTI

The Ewe country makes exacting demands on its people. Out of the sweats of their brows, the Ewes eke their bare livelihood, literally so. Their part of the country has no gold and diamonds and timber as have some parts of Ghana.

But, the people have an extraordinary gift for music and drumming and dancing. How, otherwise, could the people of Eweland have maintained such good humour and optimism in the face of hardship!

The poems which follow are words of folk songs. Not mummified folk songs dug out from an archaeological pile; but living songs which, like farmers of old, the farmers of today are singing at work, as they clear the bush, plant the crops and harvest them: while they weave the cloths they wear, carve the stools they sit on or build the houses they live in.

They are above all songs which are sung to honour a departed one, and to mourn his loss.

When were they composed, — these songs? And who composed them? No one knows. What is known is that they are almost as old as the Ewe people themselves. Containing some of the richest literary pieces in the Ewe language, the songs are highly charged with emotion and, in Shakespeare's words, with "wise saws and modern instances." And the thoughts are condensed in terse language, making their translation into English a harzardous venture!

The choruses have a definite, recognisable pattern; but the solos are such that there is a wide room for creative improvisation.

Nye m'be dr3 kum mele dee,
Dr3fenyawo dia de kodzogbe (Bis)
Atamgbadee Dr3fenu:
"Dr3fenya metsia 'me si o.
Adze daa wole!"
Nenye dr3fenyawo dede e,
Ne menya ahalifenyawo vɔ!

"Nye m'be drɔ̃ kum mele ɖee,
Drɔ̃ʃenyawo ɖia ɖe kodzogbe..."

This is a poem in classic Ewe. I shall try to give its approximate meaning: I can do no more. The reader must supply the atmosphere and the background without which even an Ewe, well-versed in the language, would miss the meaning.

Here it is:

Methinks it's been a dream;
But the dream has come to life!
Atangba's son, Drofenu, says:
Believe them not:
A dream's a dream.
No more!
Truly, had dreams been real,
Death, I'd have fathomed death.

A study of Ewe traditional songs is a study of the philosophy of life, and of the values of the Ewe people. Above all, it is a study in sweet sorrow. Overlaying and underlying rural life is a vague, all pervasive sadness. The fields may laugh in the rain and the sunshine; but, they adjoin the brooding woods and hills. The birds twitter with glee on the tree tops; but below them, the moody four-footed animals prowl in dread through the thickets. To man and animal alike, there is the haunting uncertainty of the day to come: the fear of the future; the sudden disaster; the caprices of the weather; the deep mystery of natural phenomena — all this finds an echo in the songs.

Here is a poem which exemplies what I mean. It tells the story of a man who has lost his relatives through death. He alone of the clan is left behind. He bemoans his fate. But behind his moaning lies stoical strength and fortitude.

Ame vɔvɔe botoe mexe - e,
Nasi agble botoe ne mevu lo!
Yã mewua 'me, dzi gakua 'me o!
Yã wu amea ɖewo vi
Dzi le wokuu ɖzi.
Hlɔvɔvɔe dzunamelawo,
Mibia miaʃe agbedifiawo sea?

Chorus: Ne medo wome asi mɔ nu ɖe,
Dze maku, mayowo ɖe?

Last remaining, last to go:
A border mark I stand.
Were I a boundary post
On the farm's edge,
I'd heave myself
Aside and free me.

which moved them. All around them was a wealth of material — life as they led it, death, the cycles of the farm year, animals and trees, the supernatural agencies, love and hate, kindness and cruelty ... The allusions and imagery of the poems were drawn from this rich environment and from the social background of the people.

These poems cannot be sung, except on the appropriate occasion. One does not sing a mourning song, unless a death has actually occurred. Even to sing a farming song at home in the village, or to sing a hunting song without a cause, one has to apologise first to the gods. It is sacreligious to sing these when feelings have not been aroused or when it is not intended to arouse feelings.

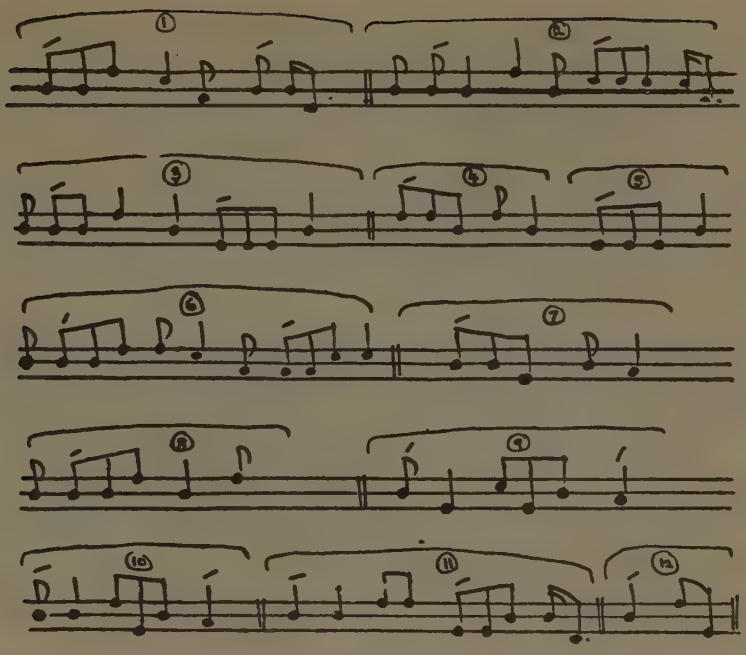
The poems were cast in rhythms all their own, making them truly West African.

Whatever differences of detail we may find between these poems and Western poetry — one unmistakable quality links them together — beauty of language and discipline of form: "the art of assimilating phenomena, whether works, images, emotions, or systems of ideas, to the deeper innate cravings of the mind." The combination of these in such a way that they are capable of evoking emotions of one type or another.

Let us analyse some of these poems:

1	Dzodzo 'vãlã nye tu ɖee	a
2	Afɔ mato yi vua dzi ɖee?	a
3	Amenɔvi-ŋutsu, glimetie:	a
4	Ne mele asiwò o	b
5	Gliwò mũ lo!	b
6	Amenɔvi-nyɔnu, aɖaɖzaɖoe ye	a
7	Ne mele asiwò o	b
8	Avuvɔ wɔ wò kpoo.	b
9	Tɔkɔ mele ŋunye o;	b
10	Nɔkɔ mele ŋunye o	b
11	Mee madó nyanyeawo na o?	b
12	Navie!	a

Where did the accents fall? Like most of our traditional music, the tune is complex double time. Some of the beats have one, some have two and some have three syllabic units. But, in Ewe, the units as such are of equal accentuation. Therefore, the English accented and unaccented syllable pattern does not apply. Neither does the metrical arrangement depend on a regular form of high-and-low sounds. The rhythm of the spoken piece, spoken in the dialect of the locality from which the song derives, is as follows:



Lines 6 to 8 repeat lines 3 to 4 with a minor variation in 8.

The tempo then slows down considerably, and the metrical pattern changes to:

Tɔkɔ mele ŋuńye o.
Nɔkɔ mele ŋunye o...

The rhythm of the last line, slower still, is a pathetic symbol of resignation: "Mee madó nyanyeawo ra o!" "In whom shall I confide?"

The rhyming pattern is: a a a b b a b b b b a. The sound "o", as an ending to the lines, predominates. Nor is this its only role. O's are to be heard in every line. Has this any significance to the theme of the poem? Turn to the English version for a moment:

1. My wings are plucked; — woe's the day'
2. Shall I ascend the tree by foot?
3. A buttress — that's a mother's son:
4. If you haven't it,
5. Down falls your house.
6. All-purpose cloth — a mother's daughter is:
7. If you haven't it,
8. You're cold-exposed.
9. Relations on the father side,
10. Relations on the mother side,
11. None. In whom shall I confide?
12. Oh, Brother!

A song of lament. Here is a lonely soul — without relations on the mother side or on the father side. Can you imagine a calamity graver than that in a traditional African community! The song mourns this fact. And the one sound that predominates over all others in vocal mourning in Eweland is "o".

Note how the ideas have been arranged in pairs. 3 &6, 4/5 & 7/8. 9 & 10. Other alliterative devices besides those of ideas have been employed. The "wing" (with which to fly), the "buttress" (no doubt of a mud wall), the all-purpose (loin) cloth (which alone some mothers owned) — all this is likened to the role a brother or a sister plays in one's life.

We shall next analyse another piece — one of the most touching poems of lament I've seen.

Na ye e e!
Na mumũa na 'mela
Đaḍa na 'mela
Na mlenudee
Na yɔ mele!
Azi favi megbea na yɔɔ o.
Mele na yɔɔ metɔa nam o.
Dzre wɔɔ mí le dzã?

Mother dear.'
Mother, who freely gives of what she has:
fresh food and cooked meals alike.
Mother, who never deserts the hearth.
Mother, hearken to me!
The crying child will call after its mother.
How is it that mother does not answer me when I call. —
Are we quarrelling?

Note the way pathos is engendered by the use of "Na" (Mother) in all but the third and last lines, and the evocation of the idea of a helpless child, yearning for her mother. More than any other of these poems, the rhythm of this one is so varied from line to line that it conveys a jagged impression. The rhymes of the couplets serve to bind the irregular rhythm together. It seems that the anonymous bard made the rhythm deliberately uneven in order to emphasise the gasping, choking wail of a person bereaved. A mother is here presented to us as the Giver. She is mirrored as sharing food in the farmstead, then in the hut back home; and then we are made to picture her in the kitchen. And the definition on the canvas on which this is done is very sharp indeed!

In contrast with the image of a living mother is that of a mother, lying in state — present but unseeing, unhearing, unheeding any more. "Are we quarrelling?" the singer asks the corpse. The superb touch of a skilful composer lies in the manner in which all this is subtly conveyed — "I'm calling mother! She heeds me not!" And then the down-to-earth, heart-breaking line: "Are we quarrelling?"

Note, too, the highly compressed language:

mumɑ̃anamela — a giver of the food that can be eaten raw;
dadanamela — a giver of the cooked food;
mlenudee — one who sits by the cooking stove.

Other poems in our list illustrate this form of condensation of thought and expression.

Let's go back and take another look at the poem 'Nye m'be dro kum mele dee..." "Methinks it's been a dream..." That's to say, what was feared has come to be; that which was merely imagined, has turned out to be a reality; the news I hoped would prove untrue is a fact, alas! Like many poems of this nature, the various concepts and figurative speeches are not given a chance to fade smoothly one into the other: they are introduced, as it were, in flashes, in clearly defined abruptness, in sharp contrasts. And the flight of thought and emotion are expressed by sudden alternations of metaphorical motifs.

In this poem, however, the metaphor of a dream theme has been sustained throughout, broken by the conflict between what is generally believed: *dreams are a phantasy;* and the deviation of what is generally accepted to be true: *a dream has come true.* And yet, the speaker still feels that if all he had known in dreams were the reality, he would have known all there is to know about the hereafter. The hereafter, "ahali", has been personified in order to heighten the vividness of the conception. "Ahali" is an affectionate name for death.

This is a poem which while telling a story, also probes the philosophical foundations of life.

Nye ya mezu aɖa denutɔme:
Menye nono ta ɖe meva o lo!
Miatsi (miagblɔ) na naviwo be
Tsɛta wosea 'haha!'
Henoa sisii le dzã!

Miatsi na wo be
'Haha!' meɖua 'me o lo!
Nye ya mezu aɖa denutɔme
Menye nono ta ɖe meva o,
Akpiniawo!

One of the first songs I know is the following:
I have recited it time and again, but never tire of it.

The setting is a wooded country, watered by a stream. On the banks are a few grass plants. Imagine a grass plant bending over a running water, as it flows over a river bed strewn with rounded pebbles and stones. Momently, as the stem of the grass sways in the breeze, the tip of the hanging blade of grass bobs and dips in and out of the water. And, as if making sure that its intentions are not misconstrued, the grass says, "You know full well that a plant doesn't drink through its leaves. If then my leaves should lave in the stream, know, they're not there for the selfish reason of assuaging their thirst. I'm only a blade of grass in a stream."

Literally translated, the poem continues, "Do ask my people, why it is they flee by hearing a mere 'haha' (alarm)." The onomatopoeic word "haha!", the sound used by a person to scare another, has been employed instead of a word like "threat", "bark", or "intimidation".

A blade of grass in a stream — no more:
I haven't come to drink.
From mouth to mouth pass down the word —
No need to flee at mere alarm.
Mere noise devours no one.
I'm no more than a blade of grass
A-laving in a stream, — come not to drink.
(Over to you) Akpiniavo!

The general feature of these poems is that they are short, unlike the drum history of Northern Ghana which relates the history of a clan or tribe or extols an ancestor or a ruler. Another common characteristic is the extreme economy in the use of words. And the words used conjure up the gamut of tribal usage, history, values and physical environment. There is frequent use of quotations from celebrated minstrels and people reputed for their wisdom. Even the prattling bird Patipre's relation "Anikagro" has been quoted. While the themes are philosophical in character, the treatment of them is rather secular — employing as they do practical situations and material objects. Where reference to the spiritual world is made, the singer immediately returns to the material world.

The field from which I have drawn these songs is a deliberately limited one. The songs are those sung among the people inhabiting the valley and the

plateau of the Togoland range of mountains some twenty miles in radius around my village, Gbledee, from where these collections were made. The means of travelling in this area is still the bush paths, some of which have recently been widened to permit of an occasional truck to venture over them.

Only as recently as my boyhood days, most of the food and shelter which these people used were produced by themselves. As such, the wealth of our past in song and dance and customary usage has not yet entirely been lost. But, time is running out, both in my country and in the other West African societies. There is much left which we can still retrieve, if we tackle the job of study and research and collection, now. In the literary field, are many precious pieces in folk tales, madrigals, songs sung by children at play in the village square when the moon supplies a light, drum songs and language, hunters' songs, lullabies and cradle songs, songs for out-dooring a maiden, songs to illustrate stories, songs of asafos (youth's warrior organisations) and songs of battle, songs of challenge and of abuse, words of libation, religious prayers and songs.

It is out of the materials contained in these and their study from which modern creative writing can be built, if it is to be distinctly original and West African. There is a form of West African poetry — we must find it out.

All this confronts us with a challenge! There is, too, the challenge posed by our complete dependence on foreign books for our schools. Foreign books, we must read; but, to make text books meaningful to our children and new literates, the background must be familiar. In the matter of general literature too, we owe it to our country and to the world to make our own distinctive distribution. *The task of interpreting ourselves and our culture can best be done by ourselves.*

MIGRANTS WITH MANUSCRIPTS

SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE WEST INDIAN NOVEL

BY RANDOLPH RAWLINS

In the course of his essay on Rudyard Kipling, the late George Orwell commented on what little literature colonial countries had produced. Orwell had an interesting explanation for this. Within the British Empire, he argued, creative sensitive beings tended to stay near the metropolis. They could do so because the Empire was largely demilitarised and controlled by the Navy. In the Russian Empire, on the other hand, a system of military conscription had served to catapult all types of young Russians into the Czar's far-flung ramparts. There, like Tolstoy, they could brood and write.

The more startling thing about this argument is the fact that Orwell, ordinarily so perceptive, seemed to have entirely overlooked the creative possibilities of the indigenous peoples themselves. He was writing in 1942. Within ten years English language literature was to be enriched by a flood of writing from West Africa and, above all, from the West Indies. This seems to destroy his theory completely — until we consider two facts. Creative literature arose when these territories had ceased to be colonies; moreover the writers had won recognition and, indeed, in most cases taken up residence in London.

The rise of the West Indian novel is a matter of the last four years during which a half dozen novelists with two dozen works have established the novel as one of our most successful forms of cultural expression. To-day the profession of Man of Letters is one to which the young West Indian can aspire if in London. There is no publishing house in the West Indies; nor is there a reading public large enough to support a writer. And, so, many a migrant wends his way here with a manuscript in his suitcase.

This blossoming has been sudden indeed. As recently as 1950, say, the most omnivorous reader would barely recall the names of two West Indian authors. During three hundred years of the British connection some literature had been

produced. But it had largely been what may be called utilitarian literature as contrasted with the creative literature of to-day. It was directly political or descriptive; the typical work was a polemical tract, or a history, or an estate manual or a travel journal. Around the 1830's, when the abolition of slavery was being debated, utilitarian writing reached its highest peak. It reached another peak in the 1930's when a group of West Indian intellectuals centred around the International African Bureau in London attacking the colonial system and its works.

Two books of that age are likely to outlast the whole body of utilitarian literature. The Black Jacobins written by C.L.R. James appeared in 1937; it was an epic history of the Haitian Revolution and a brilliant Marxist study of the mechanics of revolution. Capitalism and Slavery by Eric Williams, published in 1945, was based on an Oxford dissertation presented in 1937. One of Dr. William's conclusions attacked the conventional view that slavery was abolished because of the humanitarian campaign. He maintained that the humanitarian campaign only succeeded when it became apparent that slavery, as an economic system, was unprofitable. If James created an epic, Williams destroyed a myth; both wrote with a polemical vigour and sense of contemporary parallels rare in scholarship to-day. But both books were, in the final analysis, works of scholarship with relatively small appeal. From the pens of other West Indians, however, poured a stream of more popular if more ephemeral works on the colonial question. The ferment of the 1930's was almost as great as that of the 1830's. In this context therefore the West Indian novel is seen to be no exotic blossom springing up wondrously from wasteland. It is a new bloom from old roots.

Of course there is no sharp dividing line between the political writer and the novelist, between the age of political concern and the age of imaginative creativeness. C.L.R. James, author of "Black Jacobins" also wrote a novel "Minty Alley", the only West Indian novel published in England during those days. John Hearne, himself among the most distinguished of our novelists, today, has written two political novels which recall the mood of the 1930's and remind us of André Malaraux. That is true, too, of the poetry of Martin Cartar. There is no sharp dividing line, but there is a link between the two outlooks. Victor Reid's "New Day" is a historical novel about Jamaica, published in 1950. It deals with the fortunes of the Campbell family between 1865 and 1944. In 1865 the Morant Bay insurrection led to the withdrawal of Jamaica's constitution, in 1944 self-government with universal suffrage was granted. The novel is a good synthesis of Jamaican history, after the Whig style. But it is more than fictionalised history; for Reid has taken the bold step of writing throughout in Jamaican dialect. It makes for hard going, even to fellow West Indians, but it shows a preoccupation with style, with purely literary considerations, which foreshadowed the coming of the novelist. And come they did, in 1953 the year which saw the publication of George Lamming's "In The

Castle Of My Skin", Sam Selvon's "A Brighter Sun", Roger Mais's "The Hills Were Joyous Together", and Edgar Mittleholzer's "Morning at The Office", Mais was to die shortly after with three rather uneven works to his credit. In the four years which have elapsed three more names have been added, John Hearne winner of the Powys Award with his first novel "Voices Under The Window"; E. de Boissiers, a Trinidadian resident in Australia, whose "Crown Jewel" was published there and in East Germany. Finally a few months ago came Naipaul's "Mystic Masseur" a comic novel, second of its type.

What then has led to the rise of the West Indian novel? In the first case, there has been a liberation of abilities once the political issues of the thirties had ceased to bedevil our writers. Then it is clear that once a certain level of literacy and self-consciousness were reached the West Indian could be counted on to make his contribution to thought or creativeness. The Caribbean is the Mediterranean of the New World. Like the ancient Greeks the Caribbean people live at the cross-roads of the world. Here England, the U.S.A. France, Holland and Spain have erected the outward forms and institutions of their culture But the Africans, Asians and Europeans who lived beneath these flags have remoulded the forms to their hearts' desire. To the educated class the gulf between external model and internal adaptation is today a never ending source of wonder, as it was once a source of distress.

In his last two novels, both slightly mystic in tone, Roger Mais has given a moving picture of West Indian Non-Conformist Christianity. Slevon and Reid have utilised West Indian English with its visual imagery, directness and new rhythms. Political life once meant sudden explosions of violence after long periods of need and frustration. That is the background to De Boissiere's "Crown Jewel" and to Hearne's "Voices Under The Window". Society has been divided and sub-divided on the oddest criteria, of skin, colour and hair texture. This Mittleholzer has dissected with the skill of a detached foreigner. Slavery, now viewed across the years, is the backdrop to some of his works. And then there is migration, a chronic theme in West Indian history, a theme in the history of many of our writers. The West Indian abroad is the core of Lamming's "Emigrants", of Selvon's "An Island is a World". But all this can only be part of the explanation, for most of these themes have always been at hand. One needs clues that are more limited and, perhaps, lowly, but more precise. They lie in certain developments that have taken place during the post-war years.

There has been, for example, the B.B.C. Caribbean Voices, a programme beamed to the West Indies and serving as a training school for many of our writers. More important, there has been a newly awakened general interest in the colonies, one felt by British publisher and reader alike. The change from colonies to self-governing dominions has been a political fact driven home by the popular press. This change has been the background for several novels by English writers. The novelist, when an ex-colonial himself, can also bring to life the people behind the new parliaments and constitutions. With his unique

power of entering into men's minds and turning them out for our inspection he can explain more palatably than any journalist or historian the new citizens of the strange new countries. But one hand cannot clap, as the West Indian proverb says. The more important hand, the writing hand, is in the West Indies, and it is there that the really vital development has taken place.

Self-government and Federation have led to an unprecedented outburst of political activity. West Indians have become conscious of their responsibilities, of their problems, and so, ultimately of themselves. While the West Indian people have grown self-conscious, the educated West Indian has learnt self-esteem. He has started to cast his eyes about his own world appreciatively, exploring to identify himself, recording how West Indians live, discovering what is a West Indian. The well-known novel "In The Castle Of My Skin" is concerned with such a process of self-discovery. For the educated West Indian to take his world so seriously is a minor pschological revolution. His attitude to most things West Indian had ranged between indifference and contempt. Professor Simey once described the West Indian middle-class as Victorian. It has been Victorian in the sense of trying to be proper.

You will recall that I described how the mass of people had altered European languages and religion. Their folk songs were often bawdy, their dances were viewed as erotic. Among them illegitimacy was rife. The educated class sought to disassociate itself from these slip-shod, tropical deviations. The educated West Indian had gone to school in England and would go back for his holidays. He belonged to a recognised church. He spoke properly and dressed properly wearing serge suits in the noon-day sun. This attitude goes back to the days of slavery. Between white masters and black fieldhands there had been an intermediary group of freedmen, usually of mixed bloods, growing in numbers and in wealth. Though free, they were second-class citizens. In Trinidad they were tried before a special court; in Jamaica they could inherit but so much land; in British Guiana they could not hold militia commissions. Before slavery was abolished this group fought and won their own struggle for first class citizenship. Thus they were set apart from the masses of people by legal status, by wealth, by colour and by education. Inevitably they sought to emphasise all these indices of difference. Political life might have bridged this gap by provoking the educated elite into closer contact with the masses. But representative institutions were withdrawn two decades after abolition. Under the Crown Colony system the English Governor was the apex of society, English life the model.

To-day the wheel has turned almost full circle. The calypso and steelband, carnival and interpretive dancing are accepted as bona fide cultural expressions. We recognise and accept our world; the novelist is only one among its entrancing explorers. The main reason for this change has been the fact of self-government and full internal suffrage. External ties and values are cut away; we have to live together and with ourselves. The war too has played its part, by transporting many West Indians, including at least three of our novelists, to the world

outside whence our society could be more clearly seen. It has brought the world to us too as Selvon has shown in his "A Brighter Sun" where the American base-builders shake up the whole pattern of village life.

I have dwelt at some length on our social history not only because it explains the rise of the novel but also because it is paramount to any understanding of two significant works. In Jamaica the educated middle-class is known collectively as "brown men". In the novels "Voices Under The Window" and "Stranger at the Gate" the hero is a 'brown man' in politics leading a mass party. He is killed in the line of duty; killed because he is not really trusted by his followers. Though he himself is aware of this distrust and does not merit it, he accepts it. They are more than political novels. They are our morality tales. Their tragic theme is this: rejection and betrayal in the past is repaid by rejection and betrayal in the present.

Fortunately our political life to-day does not justify such pessimism. One index of our break with the past is the rise of the novel. One architect of a brighter future is the novelist himself.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE BRAVE AFRICAN HUNTRESS
BY AMOS TUTUOLA

Illustrated by Ben Enwonwu.
Faber and Faber, 1958.

When Tutuola's first book, "The Palm Wine Drinkard", appeared in 1952 an eminent British critic wrote: "The first paragraph knocks one flat". And what a magnificent opening it was indeed:

> I was a palm-wine drinkard since I was a boy of ten years of age. I had no other work more than to drink palm-wine in my life. In those days we did not know other money except COWRIES, so that everything was very cheap, and my father was the richest man in our town.

Who could fail to be intrigued by this opening paragraph, who could resist the slow rhythm of these sentences? And the book amply fulfilled the promise of this opening. The language of the "Palm Wine Drinkard" is quaint, but it is rhythmical and poetic, and the tale is a strange mixture of vision, humour and myth. How disappointing, in comparison, is this last book of Tutuola, "The Brave African Huntress". Just compare the opening paragraphs:

> I, Adebisi, the African huntress, will first relate the adventure of my late father, one of the ancient brave hunters, in brief:
> My father was a brave hunter in his town. He had hunted in several dangerous jungles which the rest hunters had rejected to enter or even approach because of fear of being killed by the wild animals and harmful creatures of the jungle.

The rhythm and the magic are gone. The sentences do not flow. As prosaic as this opening paragraph is the whole book. In vain one searches here for the poetry and vision of Tutuola's earlier books. Adebisi, the brave huntress goes to the bush of the pygmies and overcomes there a series of horrible giants. But none of the creatures she meets are as memorable as "the complete gentleman", or the "red fish", "the four hundred dead babies", "the flash eyed mother" or the "satyr" of his earlier books. It is as if his vision had failed him. Compare the description of this monster from "The Brave African Huntress" with the "red fish" from the "Palm Wine Drinkard":

> It was as big as an elephant. I had never seen the kind of this animal before. Because he had a very big head. Several horns were on his forehead. Each of the horns was as long and thick and sharp as cow's horns. Very long black and brown hairs were full this head and they were fallen downward, they were also very dirty. All the horns were stood upright on his forehead, as if a person carried a bunch of sticks vertically. His beard was so plenty and long that it covered his chest and belly as well.

Tutuola goes on to describe this animal for half a page, but in the end we fail to "see" it, and therefore we are not horrified. How much more visionary is this description in the "Drinkard":

> His head was like tortoises head, but it was as big as an elephant's head and it had over 30 horns and large eyes which surrounded the head. All the horns were spread out as an umbrella. It could not walk, but was only gliding on the ground like a snake and its body was just like a bat's body and covered with long red hair like strings..... All the eyes which surrounded its head were closing and opening at the same time as if a man was pressing a switch on and off.....

This failure of vision is noticeable not only in the descriptions and the imagery but also in the tale itself. "The Palm Wine Drinkard" is full of symbolism. (For an analysis of this I must refer the reader to Gerald Moore's article in "Black Orpheus" No. 1). The closing chapter describing the conflict between heaven and earth rises to the level of a great universal myth. The whole book, in fact, has a kind of cosmic setting, and Gerald Moore did not exaggerate when he classified the "Drinkard" as a variant of the great heroic monomyth. "The Brave African Huntress" has lost all mythological significance. There is no symbolism, it is a mere adventure story, or rather a string of adventure stories, very loosely knit together. Surprisingly ,there is even very little humour in the book, nothing to compare with the conversations between Simbi and the Satyr in Tutuola's preceding book. The lack of inspiration which is so noticeable may be due to the fact that Tutuola has derived nothing from Yoruba folklore in this book. (The story of the king of Ibembe town being the only exception.) He apparently tries to make up for this by quoting many Yoruba proverbs, and attempting to coin some new ones as well. This is quite a charming innovation. Unfortunately the proverbs are not always very meaningful to non-Yorubas in Tutuola's translation. For example:

> The thief who steals bugle. Where is he going to blow it?
> In this world of the white men or in heaven?

The joke is rather lost on anybody who does not know that "bugle" is Tutuola's translation for "kakaki trumpet", an instrument that can be played only for the king.

Finally a word about the editing. We appreciate the fact that the publishers do not wish to tamper with Tutuola's style. To translate "The Palm Wine Drinkard" into "correct" English would mean to destroy the rhythm of it. One of the great excitements of reading Tutuola is in fact his fresh West African idiom, the colour and imagination of his language. But it is rather unfair on the part of the publishers to leave even spelling mistakes uncorrected. Tutuola's language will lose none of its poetry, his style will not lose character if he is told that "gourd" is not spelled "guord". It is mere sensationalism on the part of the publishers not to correct a mistake like the following: "I thank you all for the worm affection you have on me." The publishers are in this case no longer interested to preserve Tutuola's originality, they are inviting the readers to have a good laugh at his expense. I wonder whether the publishers realise how much harm they do to Tutuola's reputation in West Africa through this kind of thing? There has been a great deal of opposition to Tutuola on the part of young West Africans. They suspect that his success in Europe is not based on literary merits but on his curiosity value. They feel that Europeans merely

laugh at the "funny" language and the "semi-literate" style of Tutuola. The publishers attitude confirms these suspicions in the eyes of the younger generation and helps to blind them to Tutuola's genuine literary merits.

One also fears that this new book will confirm Tutuola's critics in their view that his books are mere hackneyed story telling. But those who say "Let us have books about real people at last from West African authors" I advise to go back and read Tutuola's first three books again after reading "The Brave African Huntress". Nothing could be more "real" than Tutuola's great creations of the imagination. "Death" digging up the yam garden, "earth" sending a sacrifice to heaven, "Child-Wiser-than-his-father", "the beautiful superlady", "the skull", "the silvery-ghost" and the "flash-eyed mother" have rather more life than the "real" people in the "real" town of Lagos in "People of the City". Tutuola at his best is not a mere story teller but a creative poet whose creatures of imagination are unforgetable.

AKANJI.

PEOPLE OF THE CITY
BY CYPRIAN EKWENSI

Amos Tutuola may be the first West African to have published a novel in English, but his marshy world of fantasy and nightmare, of ghosts and spirits, is very different from the one described in Cyprian Ekwensi's "People of the City". Ekwensi is a pioneer because he is the first West African to write a modern novel about contemporary life. This is the beginning of a new literature and almost certainly of greater interest to West African readers than Tutuola's mixture of fantasy and tradition. Posterity will thank Tutuola for recording a phase of West African life before it disappears for ever. Judgment may be harsher on Mr. Ekwensi in the final analysis, but now, in this day and age, he has something important to contribute. This is the first time that we have seen life in the Big City from the West African point of view; no European could have the same particular insight or knowledge of Lagos life — for what other city could this be? No European could have quite the same spontaneous affection for the warm teeming mass of humanity spilling out into the city streets.

The hero of the story is Amusa Sango, described on the first page as "a most colourful eligible young bachelor." Sango has come from the Eastern region to make his fortune in the big city. He has a job as a crime reporter on one of the leading papers, and spends his spare evenings leading a dance band at a night club. These two occupations afford him access to the whole range of Lagos and are the background to his love-life. This background takes predominance over any plot or character development. The main theme is the story of a young man educated to matriculation standard, who comes to the big city; through ignorance and inexperience he finds himself involved in various ordeals and disturbing emotional adventures. Eventually, however, he attains some sort of wisdom, spurred on by the love of a Good Woman and we leave him thus rewarded, about to start out on a new career in Ghana.

The action of the book centres round the three women in his life and the events which spring from his associations with them.

The first is Aina, full-blooded and sensual, attractive to Sango and in love with him — after her fashion. Aina is uneducated and lives in squalor and poverty, and the ambitious Sango though physically involved cannot afford to take her too seriously. She is imprisoned for petty theft and on her release backmails Sango. At about the same time, Lajide, Sango's wealthy and unscrupulous landlord turns him out of his lodgings. In his efforts to raise more money for Aina and find accommodation in the overcrowded city, the process of self-mortification begins for Sango. He becomes aware that he must re-assess his own standard of values. He is deeply shocked, for example, by a visit after-dark to Aina's grasping old mother, he finds her in a room whose "entire floor was covered with sleeping bodies. There must have been a hundred or more in this bedless dormitory. Everyone but the old woman slept on the floor. Old, young, lovers, enemies, fathers, mothers suckling babies, they all shared this hall."

Beatrice is the second woman, a sophisticated gleaming little beauty who comes to the nightclub where Sango plays. He falls in love with her and she professes to love him. She is already the mistress of an Englishman and a wealthy Gold Coast timber merchant but goes to live with Lajide in order to get a good appartment and leaves him sporadically for a rich Lebanese, thus it is hard to understand the use of the word "Love". Through Sango's eyes, Ekwensi seems to accept the more blatant sexual values and so obviously revels in lush descriptions of feminine attractions that it is hard to be convinced when Sango falls in love with his future bride's beautiful soul. She is referred to as Beatrice the Second, since—rather unfortunately—she has the same name as the girl of the nightclub. At the end of the book, after they are married, Beatrice asks Sango to take her back to the lagoon where they first fell in love, and Sango promises her a life full of "opportunity" and "freedom of expression" when they return from the Gold Coast. He has lost his job as a reporter after writing an indiscreet report. Beatrice replies: ".....Let us snatch happiness from life, now-now, when we're both young and need each other".

On this spurious note of sentimentality we can almost hear the Hollywood choir of synthetic angels singing in the background as Beatrice, in her lady-like way, allows a "tiny pearl of a tear" to steal down her cheek.

During the course of these affairs, Sango has many adventures and is exposed to many social and moral problems. The plot is loosely strung together, however, and there is a complete lack of character development. This is, I think due to Ekwensi's inability to convey emotion at different levels. The heights and depths of passion are never reached because he leaves out the infinitesima shades of meaning which make up the fabric of our daily lives. Is this because the author lacks perception or because he lacks the ability to express himself with greater sensitivity? The same question arises in relation to Ekwensi's attitude to the social problems he exposes, and makes the book difficult to evaluate. We are not quite sure what the author wants to say, it is

not surprising that reactions to the book (which was published in 1954) are varied. Some find the author's implied acceptance of shoddy values disquieting; others regard the book as an important social document which aims at stimulating people into improving city conditions. The truth probably lies somewhere in between and the result is to some extent obscured by the style which shows a lack of experience and technical skill despite a flair for vivid description.

Ekwensi skims over the surface of human relationships; he gives more thought to social and moral problems, but I do not think he intended himself to be taken too seriously. He wished to expose the bribery and corruption, the quack doctors and loose women, the terrible housing conditions and unscrupulous landlords. He wished to provoke thought and possibly action on these things. But most of all he wanted to paint the life of the city people he knows and loves, and this he has done brilliantly. He covers the whole fascinating range from petty traders to the smart, white-uniformed girls who serve in the big stores; from Lajide, surrounded by his eight wives, to Beatrice the Second in her respectable surroundings—"no rent-grabbing house but a real home," He describes street drumming parties and the sinister Umfe Society, a kind of Free Masonry which guarantees financial security for its members but demands a human sacrifice in return.

He is particularly good at describing the clothes people wear and the significance they have. Take Bayo the Spiv, for example:

> "He had a habit of dropping in on Sango whenever he felt like jazz. Sometimes he came alone, sometimes with his friends, who also wore narrow trousers, thick crepe soles and dark sun-goggles."

— and his girl friend Dupeh —

> "Put her on the Marina in her pink silk frock with its lace frillings, give her a red handbag and high-heeled shoes and let her walk in the sun. Then you would be meeting the exclusive "city girl".

He tells us that a smart girl wears the "latest thing in specs" and that men cannot resist earrings, glittering and swinging provocatively. It is these details which build up the whole complex structure of the city life Ekwensi puts before us; for anyone interested in the development of West Africa today it is a fascinating study.

ELIZABETH BEVAN.

A WREATH FOR UDOMO by Peter Abrahams Faber and Faber 1956.

"A Wreath for Udomo" is the only novel in the English language that deals with nationalism and politics in West Africa. Yet very few Nigerians seem to have read it. For all its shortcomings this is an important book and it is above all important that West Africans should know it, should react to it and reply to it. It is for that reason that we discuss the book amongst our reviews, two years after publication.

The first part of the novel is set in London where Udomo, the hero helps to form a nationalist group that plans the liberation of his country "Panafrica". Udomo finally returns home and starts a nationalist newspaper. But his hands are tied by the compromising business men who own the paper and suppress his more radical articles. Finally he uses the occasion of a dock strike to call the people to revolt. The market woman Selina proves a powerful ally. She manages to circulate the paper illegally and when Udomo is arrested and imprisoned for "sedition" according to plan, Selina rallies the people and builds up Udomo as a martyr and a hero. The British finally grant a new constitution and Udomo is elected whilst in prison. He is released and leads his people into independence. The position of the national leader becomes difficult, however. His friend Mendhi, a native of Pluralia has taken refuge in Panafrica. Mendhi uses Panafrica as a base for organising riots in Pluralia where the Africans are greatly suppressed. The leaders of Pluralia demand the extradition of Mendhi from Udomo. Unfortunately they are just about to give a large loan to Panafrica, and they have promised to help build a huge industrial project and supply the technicians. Udomo very reluctantly betrays his friend to the enemies.

But Udomo's greatest conflict is with the forces of reaction and tradition. He is accused of destroying the old ways of life, and of having brought more white men to the country than there had been in the times of colonialism. A conspiracy headed by Selina ends in Udomo's murder. But the author gives us to understand: Udomo's work can no longer be undone. He has pushed his country along too far on the new road — there is no way back. The new Africa has become a reality.

The two main problems discussed here seem to be: the conflict going on in Udomo's mind between political necessity and the demands of his conscience, and the external conflict between Udomo as the fighter for new ways of life and Selina the representative of tradition.

In the first conflict Udomo is made to let political ends get the better of his conscience. Personally he betrays his best friend Mendhi to the Pluralians. Being accused by their common friend Mabi of murder, Udomo replies:

> "I had to! We can't allow personal feelings to interfere with duty. Duty to Africa! Her people! My people and yours! The future! ..... You want to be a patriot provided you can safeguard your precious soul. You know I had to. Only, no dirtying of hands for you! Leave that to the foul Udomo .....
> I have to deal with realities, not your fancies."

There is undoubtedly logic in his reply. But it is the logic of a dictator. Dictators have always looked upon themselves as martyrs, left to do the dirty work for everybody else. This argument is a dangerous one, because it can be used to justify any action, it puts the leader of the state outside morality. For a while it is not clear where the author's sympathies lie in this argument. But in the last pages of the book he comes down heavily in favour of Udomo. It seems, that Peter Abrahams, like Richard Wright, believes in dictatorship for West Africa.

Whatever we may think of Peter Abraham's judgment here, we must admit that he treated the situation convincingly. Udomo appears like a plausible and real character in this conflict, whom we can pity even if we cannot justify him.

In his treatment of the second conflict Peter Abrahams is much less successful. It is clear enough what ideals and concepts Udomo stands for, but the forces of opposition are never really described or explained. Such phrases as "tribalism" and "old ways" and "putting the clock back" are newspaper jargon, propaganda cliches. In what does the alleged evil of this "tribalism" consist? We are never told, we are never allowed to witness the life of the non-progressive Africans. Udomo therefore appears to be fighting against some bogus enemy and his downfall in the book comes as a surprise. Udomo speaks pathetically about the worst enemy of his people: the past. The past, which is a worse enemy even than the white man. It is really absurd, that the nationalist leader who drove out the white man from his country should at the same time succumb to the prejudices of the white man. As if an African could be respected as a human being only after he has been made to work in a factory. As if the talking drums of the Akan or the bronzes of Benin were symbols of an undignified unhuman existence. Peter Abrahams has succumbed to the white man's myth of the "primitive" negro.

He fails to recognise the real forces at work. The so called "old ways" of life are being destroyed in Africa largely through economic factors. It is the big European trading houses that have destroyed, for better of for worse, traditional ways of living. Politically, the old ways of life are not a force. The illiterate farmers and their chiefs are no game for the modern politician, who is backed up by administrative experience and a police force. There has never been political organisation in West Africa whose purpose it was to "put back the clock". The opposition parties in all West African territories are led by intellectuals of the same class and hold basically similar beliefs as the representatives of government. The only real opposition which is sometimes met by the politician from the illiterate farmer manifests itself in a certain reluctance to pay taxes. Peter Abraham's conspiracy of "tribalists" is rather fanciful.

The real conflict between old and new ways of life in West Africa takes place on an entirely different plane. It is a gross simplification to describe a battle between two neatly divided camps. The conflict goes on in the mind of every individual and will go on for a long time. The illiterate farmer hiring

a rediffusion box, the pagan priest riding on a bicycle, the market woman selling imported textiles are all breaking up the old ways of life, and have all set out on the "new road" of Udomo. On the other hand an understandable reaction has begun among many West African intellectuals. Nationalism has made people selfconscious. The rejection of a foreign way of life involves the assertion of ones own way of life. What does it mean to be a Ghanaian? or a Nigerian? How to identify oneself, how to distinguish oneself from the white man and his culture? The young West African is involved in a process of revaluation. He refuses to see himself through the white man's eyes. He has claimed the right to be his own judge of his own world. Thus looking at his life *and his past* with a fresh eye, he finds much that he acknowledges as an integral part even of modern African life. Much that was defamed by the white missionary and the trader and the administrator as "primitive" becomes a rightful source of national pride. The modern West African is finding his roots. Tradition is to him the soil out of which the new African life will grow.

Peter Abrahams, in describing tradition and progress as two opposite camps and identifying them with good and evil has missed the real point. He has also created a false impression of West Africa and one fears that a European reader with little background knowledge of West Africa may be left with the impression that there are bloodthirsty "tribalists" in West Africa hunting down politicians and trying to re-establish the primitive ways of "tribal glory".

AKANJI.

CARIBBEAN LITTLE REVIEWS

BIM edd. W. T. Barnes and F. A. Collymore. Barbados, B.W.I. approx. 2/6.
CARIBBEAN QUARTERLY edd. A. T. Carr and P. M. Sherlock. University College of the West Indies, Jamaica, B.W.I. approx. 2/6.
KYK-OVER-AL edd. A. J. Seymour. Georgetown, British Guiana. approx. 2/6.

These are leading journals in English from the West Indies. The statement made in the first number of *Caribbean Quarterly*, in 1949, describing its aim as the organ of the Extra-Mural Department of the University College of the West Indies, may well be used to indicate the function of all the above-listed journals: they offer to West Indians reliable reading on their own history and culture, and on social developments in the Caribbean; and they seek to enable West Indians to keep in touch with significant cultural and social events elsewhere. This function has been performed with a considerable degree of success for more than ten years by *Bim* and *Kyk-over-al*, and just a little under that by *Caribbean Quarterly*.

Bim and *Kyk-over-al* are more in the nature of little reviews than is *Caribbean Quarterly* which has a bias for studies by both amateurs and experts in the fields of sociology and history. *Bim* takes the palm for literary eminence since in its pages have appeared over a number of years poems, short stories, and essays by such well known West Indian writers as Edgar Mittelholzer, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, Roger Mais, and John Hearne. *Kyk-over-al*,

though not up to the literary standard of *Bim*, has much to commend it as a cultural link between the British Caribbean islands and British Guiana which has chosen to stay outside the recently constituted Federation of the West Indies. Seymour, himself a poet, has done much towards creating a poetry-reading public in British Guiana; and he has from time to time devoted a whole issue of *Kyk-over-al* to West Indian and British Commonwealth verse. The frequent exchange of ideas between himself and Collymore has been fruitful in both critical and creative work. Collymore's interesting series of notes in *Bim* on the Barbadian English idiom provoked a similar piece of research on British Guiana English by Richard Allsopp. *Caribbean Quarterly*, of course, casts its net wider to include, besides several studies of English speech, interesting observations on French Patois or Creole in the Caribbean where some scholarly work has been done by people like Elodie Jourdain, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, and George Sylvain.

A common characteristic of the three journals is an interest in African culture patterns transported across the Atlantic to the West Indies and considerably modified over the centuries, in some cases beyond recognition, except perhaps to the eye of the trained observer. This interest is manifested, on the one hand, in the factual studies, usually published in the *Caribbean Quarterly*, of religious cults and social practices; and, on the other, in the themes and symbols of fiction and verse writers who contribute to *Bim* and *Kyk-over-al*.

Anyone interested in the cultural activities of the Caribbean today, and especially of the British territories, will find these journals not only interesting in themselves, but also useful as an index of Caribbean life and letters.

J. A. RAMSARAN.

VOICES OF GHANA

Literary Contributions to the Ghana Broadcasting System 1955–57
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Accra 1958 — — 7s. 6d.

While this number of Black Orpheus is going to press we receive this most important publication from Ghana. While we cannot discuss the book in full in this number, we wish at least to draw attention to such a valuable publication. So far it was almost impossible for the student of African literature to form any clear picture of Ghana new writing. Isolated poems by Ghanaian authors could be found in various journals like "African Affairs". Of the few books published by Ghanaian authors, most—like Dr. Danquah's "Third Woman' and Dei Anang's "Wayward Lines from Africa"—have been out of print for quite a while. This anthology is extremely welcome therefore. Mr. Swanzy, who has done a lot to encourage African writing when he was editor of "African Affairs" has once again rendered a service to the cause of African literature.

"Voices of Ghana" contains a great variety of writing. Traditional poems, some in the original language, some in translation, contemporary poetry, folk tales and modern short stories, radio plays and serious articles on literary subjects.

There is a great deal of valuable material in this volume: a scholarly article by Mr. Nketia on "The Poetry of Drums" opens the anthology. There is much and varied poetry: the sophisticated, polished Albert Kayper Mensah contrasts with Israel Kafu Hoh who never fails to charm through his very simplicity. From the large number of poems the following linger in the mind: Efua Sutherland's "New Life at Kyerefaso", Adali-Mortti's "Tumble Down Woods", A. A. Opoku's long decriptive poem "Afram" and Frank Parks "African Heaven".

The prose writing on the whole is rather less successful. There is a lot of good descriptive prose writing in this volume, pleasant little genre pictures of Ghana life. But the language is extremely conventional and shows as yet none of the freshness and originality that one associates, for example, with West Indian writing.

Another surprising fact about this anthology is that there is no controversial subject treated in it at all. One would have expected young Ghanaians to be absorbed by basic questions of identity at this stage: what *is* in fact a Ghanaian? What do traditional African values mean to him? And to what extent must he accept the cultural values of the foreigners whose political domination he has just shaken off? How does he assert his nationalism culturally? These problems are not touched upon in this anthology and one wonders therefore whether this selection of Ghana writing is typical? It is difficult to believe, that the Ghanaian writers are unaware of the problem, that they bask in the achievement of political independence, unawares that a greater, more important type of independence has to be won: cultural independence.

We look forward to see more important writing coming from Ghana. We look forward to see writers who will force the English language into a Ghanaian mould, instead of merely using conventional language efficiently. We look forward to seeing writers who will re-examine the foreign values that were forced upon them, and will discover in themselves the values of African culture.

One final word about the production of the book. We are sorry to see that such an important book was given such an unattractive production. Surely the Government of Ghana could afford to employ a modern typographer? The looks of this publication are quite unworthy of its contents.

AKANJI.

How to Obtain Black Orpheus:

NIGERIA:

University Bookshop, University College, Ibadan, U.T.C. Ibadan and Lagos
Gabriel Okara, the N.B.C. Enugu.

GHANA:

University College Bookshop, Accra.

SIERRA LEONE:

C.M.S. Bookshop, Freetown.

KENYA:

Samuel Mbiti, P. O. Kitui.

U.S.A.:

Samuel Allen, 49 Berkeley Place, Brooklyn 17, New York.

ENGLAND:

"Better Books", 94 Charing Cross Road, London.

FRANCE:

"La Joie de Lire", 40 rue Saint Severin, Paris 5e.

GERMANY:

Horst Noack, Herrenstrasse 1, Offenbach, Main.

HOLLAND and BELGIUM:

W. A. Braasem, Laan van Meerdervoort, 541, den Haag.

ITALY:

Sna. Christiana Brambilla, Piazza Grandi 3, Milano.

SWITZERLAND:

Franz Niederberger, Biel Bienne, Höheweg 25.

PRESENCE AFRICAINE

The Cultural Review of the Negro World
published every two months articles *in French* and in English
Nr VIII-X: Full account of the 1st Conference of Negro Writers and Artists (Paris ,September 1956).
Nr XII: Yesterday Gold Coast, To-day Ghana.
Nr XIV-XV: Contributions to the Conference.
Nr XVI: The Negro man of culture and his People.
Forthcoming issues:
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Subscription rates: U.S.A. surface mail $4 England £1. 7s.
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PRESENCE AFRICAINE

Books of the year:
Mamadou DIA: Réflexions sur l'économie de l'Afrique Noire.
Mamadou DIA: Contribution à l'étude du mouvement coopératif en Afrique Noire.
Abdoulaye LY: Les masses africaines et l'actuelle condition humaine.
J. RICHARD-MOLARD: Problèmes humains en Afrique Occidentale.
Basil DAVIDSON — Le réveil de l'Afrique.
Editing firm, 17 rue de Chaligny Paris XII (France) — C.C.P. Paris 59.36.25.

O D U

A JOURNAL OF YORUBA AND RELATED STUDIES
from the contents of No. 6

GELEDE MASKS	U. Beier
THE HISTORY OF WESTERN NIGERIA	Dr. S. O. Biobaku
THE NEW DISCOVERIES AT IFE	Frank Willet
YORUBA MUSICIANS IN ACCRA	Kwabena Nketia
WALLS, PAVEMENTS AND WATERPATHS	Prof. Goodwin

General Publications Section, Ministry of Education, Ibadan, Nigeria.

A forthcoming publication by the General Publications Section
Ministry of Education, Ibadan, Nigeria.

O L O K U N

A Literary Journal in Yoruba.

This new Journal that will appear shortly will be written entirely in Yoruba. It will appear quarterly and contain articles, short stories and poems by contemporary Yoruba writers as well as traditional texts.

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born 1913 near Savannah, Georgia, U.S.A. Grew up in Michigan. Worked in the Ford factory, as a government official, finally became a free-lance writer.
His poems were first published in a bilingual edition in Germany. ("Elfenbeinzähne"; Ivory Tusks. With translations by Janheinz Jahn. Rothe Verlag, Heidelberg, 1956.) The following poems are reprinted by permission of Wolfgang Rothe: "Inconsolable", "Jason", "Eyes Watch the Stars", and "There are No Tears". The other poems are first published here.

THE ARTISTS

Cover design after a Warega carving by WENGER.

RU VAN ROSSEM did the illustrations in the text. They are all illustrations to poems by Paul Vesey.
Ru van Rossem was born in Amsterdam and is now a Head of Department of Graphic Art in the Tilburg Academy of Fine Art. He had one man exhibitions in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, London, New York, Trento etc. His work were acquired by the following Institutions: Stedelyk Museum Amsterdam, Boymans Museum, Rotterdam, Rockfeller Collection. Museum of Modern Art, New York and many others. The drawings reproduced here were inspired by the following poems of Paul Vesey: page 2 "A higher Summons"; p. 4 "The Staircase"; p. 8 "Eyes Watch the stars"; p. 14 "Inconsolable"; p. 23 "The dog stalks forth"; p. 29 "In a strange Land"; p. 50 "The mules of Cesar"; p. 64 "Willie Mac Gee" (The poems not printed in this issue can all be found in "Elfenbein-zahne" Rothe Verlag. Heidelberg.)